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THE ONES
New EXCITING
FEATURE-LENGTH NOVEL
by **BETSY CURTIS**

SPECIAL FEATURE

THE DIANETICS QUESTION
A CONTROVERSY
by 3 PROMINENT SF
WRITERS:

- **L. RON HUBBARD**
PRO
- **LESTER del REY**
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- **TED STURGEON**
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R. O. ERISMAN Editor
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ARTHUR LANE } Editors

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ALL BRAND NEW STORIES

FEATURE NOVEL

THE ONES (Art—Lee J. Ames) Betsy Curtis 4

The Bracumians, for example, loved power, sudden emotional shocks, and the taste of rotten fish. And it was just such desires that Galaxy Space Guard, Arnaud Grath, knew he was expected to make certain were gratified, even to the point of satisfying men who craved only to steal or fight. But this matter of The Ones was something else again. They seemed to covet beautiful young female dancers, but Grath couldn't be sure. And, apparently, also handsome, healthy young men. The trouble was, nobody was able to find out anything about The Ones, who they were, or where they were, or what they were up to.

THRILLING NOVELETTE

HALLOCK'S MADNESS (Art—F. R. Paul) William Tenn 47

Ransom Morrow was an explorer, yes, but how much curiosity did he really have, old Hallock wanted to know. Enough to invade a land crawling with creatures that very unfortunately were not at all inconceivable, whose greatest horror was that they had been conceived? Enough curiosity, in other words, to eat a slightly mildewed dried date?

SPECIAL FEATURE

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For the first time in the short but epithet-scarred history of Dianetics, a science-fiction magazine presents all aspects of the controversy. The editors have asked these three leading sci writers to give their views on Dianetics, and here are their stimulating arguments, side by side, with no holds barred.

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THE ONES

by **BETSY CURTIS**

CHAPTER I — VENUS

IT WAS only a week after the excitement of the commencement exercises that the new Galactic Guardsman, Arnaud Grath, sat watching the gyrations of a dancer in the Venusberg Club as the guest of Ebon Macklure, importer and man-about-town.

Tiny bubbles of pulsing red-orange light and the heavy fumes of *thiska* filled the air between the table where Arnaud and Ebon Macklure sat and the other tables in the crowded club. Macklure's purple cape moved gently in the swaying air and the smoke from Arnaud's theel tube trailed softly off toward the tiny dance floor near the end of the long room. The hypnotic rhythm of the muted balipsa seemed to sway with the currents of air and with the sparkling weaving brilliance of Aleesa as she twirled and dipped again and again in the ceremonial dance of Farewell to the Departing Ones of the sea dwellers of Venus.

Macklure watched her arrogantly, calculatingly. Sea-princess Aleesa would

**WERE LOVELY EARTH GIRLS ALL THAT THESE SPACE FIENDS
REALLY CARED ABOUT? . . . EXCITING FEATURE-LENGTH STF NOVEL!**



bring two thousand units, now that he had tired of her, he mused, and Arnaud Grath here, young, eager, healthy, resplendent in Space Guard's black and gold, might even bring three thousand. Five thousand units would fit out the slim *Night Hawk* with vortex tubes and he would have a chance at the fabulous Radiation Rubies of Rolla. How fortunate that someone should make him an offer just when he was in a position to market two young innocents.

"Like to come back to meet Aleesa?" Ebon turned condescendingly to Arnaud.

"It sounds rather pleasant," answered his companion in a voice that tried to make itself as haughty as that of the older man, "and I'd appreciate a few moments of peace out of all this clatter and stench."

The Bracumians, for example, loved power, sudden emotional shocks, and the taste of rotten fish. And it was just such desires that Galaxy Space Guard Arnaud Grath knew he must gratify, even to the point of satisfying men who craved only to steal or fight. But this matter of The Ones was something else again. They seemed to covet beautiful young female dancers, but Grath couldn't be sure. And, apparently, also handsome, healthy young men. The trouble was, nobody was able to find out anything about The Ones, who they were, or what they were up to . . .

Crouching, he moved stealthily to the edge of the small, grassy clearing. There Aleesa danced again.



His attempt at nonchalance amused Macklure. "Pretty drab to be sure," he assented. "I'll wait for you to finish the thiska, though. It's the best on five planets; and you'll want to get the last drop," he added, pursing his lips with the relish of a connoisseur and smiling to himself as he thought of the hours of insensibility awaiting the drinker of the beverage he had so carefully poured.

Arnaud rolled the last taste across his tongue, then rose. Macklure led the way to an opening in the wall beyond the balipsa players.

At the door, however, their progress was halted by a sinuous, green-robed Venusian. "You, yes," he beckoned to Macklure, but this one I do not know."

"Driva, this is my friend, my *ghurba*," and Macklure added a few words in one of the sibilant Venusian dialects which seemed to satisfy the warder, as he admitted them but strode ahead down the passage which seemed to stretch away endlessly, lighted at long intervals only by one of the tiny flickering bubbles. The passage finally curved and went downward a few paces to end in a doorway crossed and recrossed by slim filaments of opalescent light.

Macklure thrust his right hand savagely through the beams and they died away to be replaced by the customary haunting green illumination of a Venusian lamp. The three entered the room, Macklure leading.

"Macklure *ghurba* and his *ghurba*," the robed one bowed and vanished through the doorway, which was instantly filled again by the darting web of light.

Arnaud peered curiously about the room. It took a moment for his eyes, accustomed to the red-orange of the bubbles, to distinguish amid the flowing green of the lamp the shallow divan of darker green on which the lighter sparkling green form of Aleesa reclined in graceful rest.

"Ebon Macklure," she raised her hand languidly to Macklure, who pressed it to his brow and then to each cheek in the salutation of the sea people. "Who is this friend of whom Driva speaks?" Her tones were the gentle lappings of waves on the long beach at Varvane. She rose and smiled slightly at Arnaud. "He is very young. Has he seen me dance?"

She advanced down the room to a great mirror sunk into the wall, twirling and half curtsying to herself before she returned to meet the young officer who stood as one welded to the floor with amazement that the beauty which seemed entrancing on the tiny dance stage should be so far beyond it in nearer reality.

"He has truly seen your gracious self," returned the older man with a show of courtliness, "and has more than willingly volunteered to be your companion on your long and arduous journey."

"Journey?" both Aleesa and Arnaud turned to face Macklure in astonishment.

"I take no journeys, Macklure, *sheesa*; I am comfortable here, I dance well, the patrons are satisfied," her languid voice turned sweet and alluring, "are they not, officer?"

"Well satisfied, I have no doubt," broke in Macklure smoothly, before

Arnaud had a chance to reply. "But your talents were meant to please greater connoisseurs than second mates and tourists—and Arnaud Grath," he nodded toward the bewildered youth, "shall have the pleasure to present you and your dancing to those who will most highly enjoy them, the Ones of Crae!"

For a moment Arnaud seemed too stupefied to speak. Then, as he became aware of Aleesa's terror, he stiffened. "There is no need," he chided sternly, "to frighten her with your jokes. I think you would do well to apologize at once," he commanded, the authority of the Space Guard ringing in his voice.

"Forgive me, beautiful one," Macklure bowed humbly, but his tones were ironic. "I had no intent to perturb you, but only to make clear my sincerest appreciation of your abilities and beauty. The Ones of Crae will truly delight in you. And in you too." He turned to Arnaud. "A brave heart, a clear mind, a strong body will give them the greatest satisfaction. You may be flattered to know that the price of the two of you is enough to permit me to realize my greatest dreams."

"No, no!" Aleesa's tiny fingers grasped a shining knife, while her other hand groped behind her for a small bronze bell. "You will cease this talk or I shall have Driva remove you—and he is not usually gentle with unwanted callers."

Despite her fury, Arnaud could see her shuddering; and he started threateningly toward Macklure.

"You cannot harm me." A fire burned behind the eyes of Macklure's handsome face. "Your hands cannot rise, your feet cannot move." His chanting tones were as splinters of ice in Arnaud's veins.

Arnaud felt the muscles of his arms, his legs, become rigid. "You doped me," he said accusingly.

"Hypnoamine in that prize *thiska*," Macklure admitted proudly. "You will stand so until further orders from me. And now," he turned to the trembling Aleesa whose free hand still fumbled for the small bell whose shrill clangor would bring Driva and his henchmen, "you will come with me quietly or I shall have to drug you too."

Her hand found the bell, but Macklure reached her before she could ring it. Snatching the bell, Macklure grabbed her other wrist and shook the glinting knife to the floor. With this grip on her wrist, he forced her body forward and down, tapped the back of her head none too gently with the bell. She slumped to the floor in a pitiful swirl of filmy green.

Macklure drew from his pocket a chased gold *theel* case which Arnaud had admired a few moments before in the upper room of the club. One of the innocent-seeming tubes was revealed as a tiny hypodermic.

"Your mind will sleep," chanted Macklure above the inert figure as he pressed home the needle. "Sleep for many days, until the Ones of Crae have need of you." He rose and looked at Arnaud. "You," he said suavely, "may keep your mind as long as your body obeys me."

The young man struggled to take a step, but there was no response from

his frozen legs. "You'll pay for this Macklure," he stated firmly. "If we have to track you to the ends of the universe."

"How quaint!" replied the other, gathering the unconscious woman up and slinging her across his shoulders, holding her by the wrists, his other hand steadying her back. "That line was worthy of one of the grade Z viz-audios they get on the asteroids. The Ones of Crae will pay, but they will pay me." He made for the glimmering doorway. "Your legs and feet will now follow me—and only me," he added threateningly.

"What do the Ones of Crae want of us?" Arnaud asked more meekly, stepping along stiffly behind.

Macklure put out a hand to break the shining curtain. "If I knew, I might not be so willing to sell you." The shimmer ceased and he went through the space, followed by the younger man.

"What are they like, the Ones, I mean?" Arnaud wanted to know.

"Your mouth will cease from speaking," ordered Macklure precisely. "You must not give the alarm to those who would stop us."

Arnaud found that his lips pressed together tightly at the command.

Macklure continued down the passage, taking a turning to the left which Arnaud had missed when they came to the dancer's dressing room. Steps went down, and Arnaud stumbled and almost fell on them. "Watch me, you fool," Macklure whispered back. "Your feet must not stumble. I have all I can carry."

The tunnel was long and the lights even farther between than they were in the first one. Arnaud went more and more slowly, until Macklure was almost out of sight ahead. Arnaud, experimenting with the strength of his hypnosis, found that he was able to pass his tongue back and forth across the inner base of his lower teeth. The tiny transmitter hidden there leaped to unseen activity.

A . . . G . . ., the signal went out to one receiver only. *Going . . . Crae . . . now . . . as . . . planned . . . Going . . . Crae . . . as . . . planned . . . Follow . . .*, Space Guard code was fast. *Do . . . you . . . hear . . . do . . . you . . . hear . . .*

The receiver, surgically inserted against the bone of the ear passage hummed. *You take the low road and I'll take the high road*, sounded in raucous tones within Arnaud's head. *Are you still with Macklure, Arnie?*

Far down the passage, Macklure halted, turned. "Grath," he hissed, "Faster! You must walk faster."

Arnaud's legs moved in quicker tempo; his tongue still moved back and forth across the contacts of the transmitter. *Yes . . . Macklure* (it was a code letter only) *. . . is . . . agent . . . no . . . more . . . talk . . . now.*

But why does Crae want you, any angles yet, man? the receiver crackled.

Macklure was still facing the young man when he caught up; and Arnaud dared only look stupid and keep his tongue from moving so the shifting of his jaw would attract no attention.

Another opening led now to a long flight of steps up into darkness. "There are three hundred steps in this flight," Macklure announced. "Your mind will keep count so that you won't fall when we reach the top. You take the girl now and follow me."

Arnaud found his arms reaching out obediently for the still body; and, shouldering her, he followed Macklure up into the black like a machine.

What did the Ones of Crae want with them, he mused as his feet moved like so much clockwork. That was part of the problem the Space Guard had not yet resolved. In his briefing for this project, he had been told only that a number of disappearances of young human adults had been accounted for by the confession of a *pragm*-addict, who said that they had been sent on slavers to Crae, that they had been paid for handsomely by some beings on that planet known only to the dying addict as 'The Ones.'

Arnaud had learned with the rest of his class, too, of those stolen humans who had reappeared on far planets with no memory of the time from their capture to their return.

He'd been told many things that day—it seemed so long ago—when he'd graduated. He remembered the Assembly Hall and how it looked, and the instructions the Admiral had given them . . .

CHAPTER II — OF CRAE

FOUR hundred men were left, packing the front seats of Assembly Hall, after the diplomas had been awarded and the undergraduates had departed to prepare and decorate Ramsey Armory for the Graduation Ball. Four hundred men, in the jet uniforms, gold harness, and scarlet boots of the Galaxy Space Guard waited impatiently for the final instructions to the graduating class presented, by long tradition, to the graduates alone by the ranking admiral of the Guard. Four hundred men were eager to be released from this last assembly to seek out congratulatory relatives and friends and the much-impressed crowds of girls who had come to Venus from all over the galaxy to attend the Graduation Ball.

Admiral Doncaster's aides were barring the doors and checking the tall windows as the Admiral approached the center of the dais facing the young men.

"You are gathered here this morning expecting me to give you a string of platitudes, telling you to go forth and do great deeds in the name of the Galaxy Space Guard and calling upon the names of past heroes for you to emulate. Instead, I am going to give you the most important lecture of your six years of preparation. You must give me your closest attention, because on your understanding and practice of what I am going to say hangs the fate of the galaxy."

The wandering attention of the group suddenly focused on the admiral, and the men sat straight in their chairs.

"For six years you have been acquiring the skills needed for transporting yourselves rapidly about the galaxy and for communicating with your fellow

Guardsmen. You have learned all standard procedures of criminal investigation as well as the psychologies of numerous races to back up those procedures. Your reactions are trained to the utmost rapidity and you might now be likened to trained hunting dogs, waiting only the word of your master to flush your quarry, pursue, and bring it down.

"But in this short hour, you must learn the principle of being your own masters, of making the judgments not only concerning who you are to hunt and how, but of the basis on which those judgments are to be made. Within each one of you must rest the whole responsibility of the Space Guard for the ultimate and continuing peace of the galaxy."

The men stirred uneasily as they felt the impact of a new idea and responsibility come upon them.

"Every creature in the galaxy," continued Admiral Doncaster, "who is capable of independent thought and action, of communication and of free will deserves your protection. That is your whole duty. You may object at once that those individuals who exploit other individuals automatically forfeit the right of such protection. *That is not true.* Your six years of psychology has taught you that there is a vast multiplicity of drives, of motives, of desires among the peoples of the galaxy. The Bracumians, for instance, love power, sudden emotional shocks, and the taste of rotten fish no less than they hate most of their own species. The Torsids of Thrale will protect, to the last individual, their right to dance to death when the music of their southern hurricanes drives them insane. Humans of earth ancestry (a very isolated type) appear to be the only species with so strong a conviction of being their brothers' keepers that they insist on forming and maintaining such an organization as the Galaxy Space Guard. There are, then, many races and many motivations. Our own race has also—as you know who are prepared as crime fighters—such irrational desires as that for more treasure than any individual can possibly use. You have learned that this is probably the result of a social memory of millenia of insecurity—nevertheless it is with us and must be dealt with.

"The manner of our dealing, however, is this. All motivations must have some satisfaction or they will cause explosions, leaving the galaxy scarred in one way or another. Any mass or individual pain, unrest, rebellion or crime are signs that all is not well in the galaxy. We must see that men who desire, for instance, only to steal or fight are given an opportunity to do so, in spite of laws for mass protection to the contrary."

A wave of unbelief, of resistant incredulity and indignation swept over the mass of men, making them stiffen their backs, toss their heads, scowl at the admiral as one man.

The admiral laughed, and the tension relaxed a little. "I can see your objections as if you had them painted on your faces in letters a meter high." He smiled down at them from the little platform. "But I mean what I just said. Your objection that such activities are anti-social, that one man cannot

live in harmony with his neighbors who hold tenaciously to their property—when his sole desire is to steal that property—is quite justified.

"Individuals must not threaten the desires of other individuals; and the would-be pirate is capable of disrupting the peace of many corners of the universe. But this would-be pirate is an individual and entitled to protection, even if, eventually, that protection is sentence to one of our so-called penal colonies—actually fair lands where thieves may prey upon thieves. This paradox should not be too much for any one of you, trained as you are in a thousand conflicting philosophies. The solution, however, is seldom easy.

"It is your duty from now on to seek out all so-called anti-social motivations and so change the manner of their expression as to satisfy the individuals possessing them while at the same time reducing their peace-destroying results to an absolute minimum. In a few minutes I shall give you a large number of cases and the methods by which they were solved; but first I must give you the principles which will henceforth guide your behavior in your business of hunting down and analyzing motives, for no motive not completely understood can be adequately satisfied or, if necessary, transmuted into an acceptably satisfiable one.

"You are to behave always, when in the presence of others, *as you are expected to behave by them*. This is part of the reason for the rather gaudy uniforms in which you are now arrayed."

The men looked self-consciously down at their black and scarlet and gold selves.

"Our race," Admiral Doncaster went on, "and many other races, have an overdeveloped sense of prestige. They want their policemen to look impressive, resplendent, and to behave with a certain amount of self-assured swagger. They want to feel protected by brave, strong, dashing-appearing men. Even those who oppose us seem to desire foemen worthy of their steel, as some old saying has it. But that is merely the beginning. You are expected, in many circles, to be both clever and naive, strong and gentle, sensible and idealistic. And only if you behave according to the expectations of the individuals with whom you are to deal will you be able to get a clear picture of what prompts their acts.

"If they were so busy trying to figure out what almost unpredictable thing you were going to do next, their attention would be on you and not on themselves—they would not so reveal their inmost drives. Pirates who *expect* to be chased by Guard Cruisers and ferreted out in the depths of space have sometimes been kept busy for their entire lives working out inventions of undetectability and undiscoverable hideouts, which gave them a minimum of time for their depredations.

"But you must never feel that such a childish game of 'cops and robbers' is unworthy of you. More lives have been saved, more peace maintained by corny theatrics than I can tell you here or you can imagine in your lonely flights between the stars.

"Behave as you are expected to behave and you will have a chance to learn—learn and you will have a chance to satisfy—satisfy and you will maintain the peace.

"And now for examples . . ."

The men listened with growing amazement as the admiral gave specific cases.

"Now that you understand your job," the admiral concluded, "I shall enumerate and describe the current problems. The first is a kidnapping racket attributed to the so-far undiscovered *Ones of Crae* . . ."

THE mind of Arnaud Grath was automatically clicking off numbers as he plodded upward. Two hundred and ninety-four, two hundred ninety-five—in five more steps he found himself coming out of another doorway onto the sand of a small, and apparently private, launching pit. The darkness was less thick; he could see Macklure striding toward the silent bulk of a space yacht, balanced fusiform upon its needle jets. Coming closer, he could just make out the lowest rungs of the slender boarding ramp. Here Macklure motioned him to go ahead, which he did slowly, hampered by the burden on his shoulder.

Macklure followed him up, retracting the ramp and dogging shut the small port. "Go through the lock into the main cabin," he ordered the exhausted Guardsman, "and stand there."

Arnaud obeyed. The faint phosphorescence of the instrument panel signalled his arrival in the cabin. Macklure, after closing the inner lock, switched on the lights and approached the couple. "Strap her into the bunk," he commanded.

Arnaud found the bunk and did so. He tried to straighten up after the completion of this task; but the master of his physical actions had not commanded this—had, in fact, apparently forgotten him. Interminable minutes he bent by the bunk. He could hear Macklure squinch down into the padding of the control chair, could hear him mutter inexplicably, "Hope Jones is in time for the transfer." He felt the vibration of the compressor and the scream of needle jets: then the great and sudden lift of the main jet threw him violently to the floor and he knew no more.

CHAPTER III — CAPTURE IN SPACE

MARCO NEERY (Galactic Guard Lieutenant) blasted off at almost exactly the same moment that Arnaud Grath hit the control room floor in the black yacht. But Marco's blast-off was under his own control. And it had been preceded by the most carefully arranged sequence of events.

The nondescript little man (actually another lieutenant) who had been beating him at a desultory game of double *jammo* in his cheap lodgings before the advent of Arnaud's message, now went cautiously down the stairs to sidle away along the edge of the block of warehouses taking care to be seen doing so by two loungers on the other side of the narrow street.

Then Marco himself, in the full uniform of the Space Guard and helmeted for blast-off in his hyper-power guard ship, came out of the door pulling on a heavy heat-jacket. "The secret of Crae! At last!" he exclaimed exultantly, in a low voice but surely strong enough to carry to the men on the other side.

Halfway up the street to the Guard launching pits where his ship *Wild Goose* was waiting, he looked back and saw with approval that the men had disappeared.

Twenty minutes out from the surface of Venus, Marco observed the flash of another blast-off. The chase was on. The hours sped.

A glance at the dark shimmering viziplate showed silver spindles now. Pursuit was close, and Marco turned intently back to the upper bank of dials. Almost the instant that the trembling needle swung to show no meteors immediately below, his left hand pressed the upper jet lever and his right pushed hard against the restraining rail in front. Another dodge and another—and the spindles lessened to dots faintly reflecting the fulgor of Sirius. One more blast with the jets and then, with the *Wild Goose* in free flight, Marco Neery laughed long and heartily. Then again he strained over the midnight viziplate, now smiling grimly as other jet trails outlined the exact dodges he had made only minutes before.

Tag in the emptiness was a losing game, if the other team had faster ships. He still had a couple of tricks, but capture was a matter of hours now, and things had to be made to look right. He entered his latest maneuvers in the autolog and pushed it away. His orders were in his head; his hope, in Arnaud Grath and his own agile brain. Let them come. He would put up a good fight, but a sensible one. He relaxed, first toes, then feet and legs, hands, arms, and head would come last. He summoned sleep, for he would need every gram of strength and wiliness in the approaching trial of cunning.

It was less than three hours later that the clangor of the large-body alarm woke him to complete alertness. Watching the viziplate attentively, he saw the tapered gleaming form of one of his pursuers approaching a position directly above him. Not until a lifeboat port opened in the side of the other ship nearest him did he fire careful blasts in that direction.

The port swung shut, only to open cautiously a couple of minutes later. Marco waited until the lifeboat pulled clear of the lock, then fired again and again, taking care to make his misses near. He laughed at the blinking green light on his panel that signalled the intention of those on the other ship to communicate with him. A Guardsman might logically refuse to parley with pirates.

"Hang your clothes on a hickory limb but don't go near the water," he hummed, firing above and below the approaching lifeboat, which finally turned and fled for the protection of the great ship. "Shoot when you see the whites of their eyes," he sang, "but don't you dare hurt the precious little individuals."

Time after time, the lifeboat crept out and returned before his fire. "Trying

to wear me out," Marco noted. So wear out he did—although it was not until forty-three hours after his Venus blast-off that he lay, slumped in the cupped saddle, apparently unconscious until he was shaken awake by one member of the six-man boarding party.

No one in the boarding party spoke a word nor removed a helmet. There was no clue to their race in the group of ungainly gray figures in regulation human spacees clumping relentlessly about the room. Marco knew that even arachnoids had been known to masquerade, bunching their extra sets of extremities into the arms and legs of the bulging spacees made for men. Nor did he hear a word after he had been grimly herded to his own lock and made to dress himself similarly. As Marco clambered awkwardly into the tiny launch, he realized again the many reasons why Grath might have been able to send no word of the nature of his captors, if these, indeed, were the handmen of Crae. The silver spindle of the nearest ship loomed toward them—the regular transport pattern of all space. Only the lack of the thirty-rod identity numerals betrayed the lack of legitimate registration. And numerals could be painted on long before a battle fleet could come close enough to investigate.

Suddenly Marco shook off the big mitts whose pressure had lightened on his shoulders as the launch approached the mother ship and jumped out of the open cockpit. He opened the tiny suit-jets and dove down on the perpendicular from the line of flight of the launch. He jack-knifed and swanned; he swept straight at the launch, then veered to one side. He tumbled and looped, circled and contorted as the tiny craft followed cautiously. He hung motionless in space for an instant until the counter pressure of both forward and aft jets squeezed him unmercifully, then spun off, sometimes toward the *Wild Goose*, sometimes full at the gleaming transport. Nicer space fits he had never performed, even for the boys at the GSG School.

At the graduation dinner, he recalled, they had presented him ceremoniously with a worn space boot painted with his name and the legend, "If You Have Fits, Put It On." Still the party in the launch made no attempt to scatter to surround him, no figure betrayed non-human anatomy by its inability to raise arms over head or by shelling off heavy spacee to follow him more freely. Only when he hung, jetting slowly feet first, feigning the coma that terminates the first spasms of space neurosis, did the launch catch up and reel him in with a tractor beam. Still motionless, he was lifted and carried through the lesser lock of the great ship, stripped of space and carried again like a dead thing to be deposited roughly in a tiny cell by figures still garbed for outer space.

He lay quietly for some minutes, waiting, not daring to open his eyes, for the approach of someone detailed to observe or dispose of him; but there was no sound or sign and he finally summoned his interrupted sleep. Coming dangers might be more exhausting. With an inward chuckle, he selected a guileless dream of early patrol training days and wandered softly into it.

MARCO NEERY was aroused hours later by a rough hand which jerked him by the shoulder into a sitting position. His eyes traveled slowly, as if half awake, up the body to the face of his awakener. He was immensely thankful to find that it was a man, even if the man was brawny and hard-faced. From the broad leather belt of the man's soiled overall hung a whip whose long lash was coiled neatly around the stubby black handle.

"Get up, you!" The man's voice matched his appearance, rough, hard.

Marco Neery rose slowly. "What do you want?" he asked mumbling the words. Then he straightened and looked sharply at the newcomer. "What ship is this and why did you kidnap me?"

"None of your damn business. Come along," responded the burly man, grasping Marco's shoulder and propelling him toward the door.

"Where?" Marco wanted to know as the other tried to shove him through the opening.

"This way," the man spun Marco's body to the left, then marched him along the curving corridor, it was obvious from the degree of curve that it was one of the mid-decks of a large ship, "and you can keep your airlock shut, because I won't tell you anything."

The two proceeded along the corridor, the only sound being the clumping of their magno-boots, to a lift-port into which the man shoved Marco, following him in. They rose for about twenty seconds—Marco calculated that this must put them within a few decks of the nose—then Marco was pushed out of another port and found himself in a corridor with a much more acute curvature. His guide rapped on a door opposite the lift port. "Gorbo and Prisoner," he called.

"Enter, Gorbo." The door opened inward and Marco was shoved through this, too. Gorbo followed.

Marco's first impression of the cabin was that it had been turned into a business office. Behind the natty little man at the great desk, several banks of filing cases rose to the ceiling and most of the floor space was occupied by neat machines bearing the magenta decal of the Auto-Accounting Machines Company, Rochester, Earth. A young man, in drab singlet and shorts, was busily feeding cards into a payroll machine, from the top of which a ledger sheet was emerging inch by printed inch.

Behind him, Marco heard Gorbo ask, "That all, boss?" and the dapper man behind the desk reply, "Wait outside, in case of trouble." Gorbo went out closing the door: the young clerk turned off the clattering machine and went through another door.

"And now, Mr. Neery," the voice of the man at the desk was suave, pleasing, "won't you please sit down." He indicated a straight chair, placed as for a secretary at the side of the desk.

"Not until I know why I'm here and what you intend to do about it." Marco replied truculently.

"That's what I'm going to talk about. Do sit down and I can explain more

quickly. You are probably hungry, but I can't let you go down for breakfast (dinner actually) until we've had a little talk."

Marco sat down, uncertainly, on the edge of the chair. "As a member of the Galaxy Guard, I demand . . ." he began.

"You demand an explanation. Of course," the man was still ingratiating. "Although demanding won't get you anything I don't choose to tell you. If you want to know how I got your name—we have your log and all the papers from your ship."

"My ship!" Marco jumped to his feet. "Where is my ship?"

"Sit down, Mr. Neery. I'll get to that in due time."

Marco sat, frowning.

"My name is Jones. I am the business and general manager of this expedition. We are on our way to Crae," (Marco started up) "with a cargo of merchandise required by that distant planet. This is, you might say, a simple mercantile expedition. As traders we are, of course prepared to forestall attacks which we consider in restraint of trade—such as your attempted interference."

"I wasn't interfering with anybody. You chased me without cause and without communication." Marco couldn't have claimed that if he had switched on the flashing receiver a few hours before. "That's aggression and punishable by life in a penal colony." The Guardsman was less suave than Jones but more to the point.

"You were known to be a threat to us; and examination of your log proves it most conclusively. At any rate you are here and your ship is adrift in an orbit about Erebus, so legal hair-splitting is unnecessary."

Marco leaned back. Until he knew the organization of command on the ship, it would certainly do no good to jump this little mephite. Let him talk on.

"Your position here now is very simple. You have two choices, either of them quite acceptable to us. You may join the recruits to Crae or you may join the cargo," Jones explained.

"Recruits? Cargo?"

"The recruits are simply those with common sense. Their duties on this ship are merely to keep order among the cargo. The recruits will become overseers in directing the labor gangs of Crae. They are paid—yes, paid well—for the amount of labor they can get these gangs to produce. Their methods of suasion are also simple—the whip. Their term of service is indefinite, usually terminating when they decide they would prefer to become part of the recruiting crew, like Ebon Macklure of whom I think you have heard and like our good Gorbo whom you have met. The cargo consists merely of cheap labor . . . picked up here and there about the systems, along with a few foolish fellows who stubbornly declined the opportunity to become foremen. This, of course, is all to the good, because the Ones of Crae would get little building done by gangs of foremen. Your choice, as a man of sense, is obvious."

Marco considered his reply calmly. "Mr. Jones," he said, "you do me no

credit at all. Slaving is an illegal and hazardous occupation. More important, it is one which, intrinsically, has very little profit connected with it. You and I know that there is no construction job which machines can't do better than men . . . and more cheaply. Except, of course, operation of those machines; and that is not a matter which can be improved by an overseer with a whip. You are a pirate. Pirates operate for larger profits than honest enterprise can guarantee. Simple payment for simple services rendered doesn't fit into the picture either. As a man of sense, I shall have to have the true details of the operation before I can make up my mind. Who are the Ones of Crae and what is their real purpose in wanting humans under their control? Why do you, with your little 'business venture' make no attempt to satisfy their desires for power or animal proteins or whatever in some cheaper and more socially acceptable manner? If I'm in your control, as you imply, there should be no reason to lie to me."

"My dear Mr. Neery, you show yourself the man of sense I predicted. However," added Jones, "I have told you all I choose to. What the Ones of Crae want with humans is none of your business . . . or of mine. There is a demand—we supply it. I can tell you honestly that I have seen the constructions taking place on Crae and the men working on them. You are quite at liberty to change your place with a whip (if you choose that) for a place in a work-gang any time you prefer, though of course not to change back again. If this seems too simple to you, you will automatically become cargo. You are, as you note, completely at our disposal. Gorbo!" he raised his voice.

The door opened and the big man stepped inside, snatching his whip off his belt as he came.

"Gorbo, will you tell Mr. Neery the duties of a recruit?"

Gorbo held up the hand containing the whip. "Rooks learn to use the whip," he stated coldly, "on targets and on men. Rooks learn that slaves don't talk and rooks don't gab either. Rooks learn to obey orders and draw their pay and that's all there is to it."

Marco faced him curiously. "Obey whose orders, boy scout?"

Gorbo tensed. "The orders of the Ones."

"Who are the Ones?"

"Masters of Crae."

"I mean, what are the Ones?"

"Rooks learn not to ask about the Ones. They get their orders by loud-speaker and they obey and don't ask or talk about those orders. If they get too nosy," he flexed his wrist, held up the whip, "they get this and then get chained in the gangs. And the gangs don't like demoted foremen." He stood grimly silent.

Jones spoke smoothly again. "And which group do you suggest Mr. Neery join?"

Gorbo smiled cruelly. "Can't say as I care. The less pay for him the more for me. I'd like the chance to paint the back of another Space Guard," he

said, swinging the whip suggestively, "but I don't have anything against him personally but that boy scout crack. If he's smart, of course, he'll join up."

"What was that about *another* Space Guard?" Marco's tone was imperative.

"Oh, we've shipped more than a dozen all told on one trip or another. We have one now in the cargo . . . just brought in. The bright boys of the universe," sneered Gorbo, "all seem to go dumb when it comes to joining up. You, too?"

Marco reflected for a moment. This was a test. The time when it mattered supremely that he do what was expected. All other Space Guards previously faced with this identical problem had made the choice of non-betrayal of their expected loyalty to those aims of the Guard known to pirates as to societies in general. But pirates, as men desiring wealth in tremendous excess of need, would believe that every man had his price. Even a Guardsman. And if only one side of the problem was being investigated by his comrades, he must, if possible, know the other side.

He turned meditatively to Jones. "I'm still not sure what's in it for me," he said doubtfully. You talk about good pay, but my salary goes on accumulating in my account whether or not the Guard knows where I am or what I'm doing. I haven't even any way of knowing whether there's a place on Crae, wherever that is, to spend the units you say I'd get. And I have no more assurance of being a privileged foreman for any length of time than you have of my not attempting to escape and bring you and your business operation to justice."

"I am almost pleased to hear your objections, Mr. Neery," replied Mr. Jones.

Gorbo snorted. "If he doesn't like your offer, let him get down with the cargo and sweat it out. I can tell him what's in it for him." There was a sudden hissing in the air and the black lash cut deep into Marco's broad back. Marco jumped, whirled, fists clenched.

Jones' voice, curt, broke in. "Thank you, Gorbo. That was most graphic. You may wait outside while I finish with Neery."

Gorbo grinned and opened the door; while Marco took a step after him.

"Sit down, Neery," commanded Jones. "If you hit Gorbo, you lose your freedom of choice. I cannot have fighting between members of this expedition."

Marco turned back: the door closed behind him.

"Are you the captain of this ship, Mister Jones?" he asked indignantly.

"That's neither here nor there," replied Jones. "You will take your orders on this ship from me. And now to take up your final considerations . . ." he lowered his voice. "It is true that you have no guarantee from us that you will maintain your status as a foreman. But you have the chance to prove it in action. You do know that if you choose otherwise we can guarantee you a place in the cargo. You will be given an opportunity on Crae to spend every unit you make. There is a well-equipped store and cafe there and there are women for your purchase. And of course, since the Space Guard will be ignorant of your whereabouts, you will continue to accumulate your pay there in case you ever return to claim it. And I think we can arrange that return if you cooperate with us now."

"You see, from time to time certain crew members become, shall we say . . . too big for their spaces. They begin to demand more than their statistically determined share of the profits of the venture in return for services which they think are indispensable. We are in a position to offer you a special bonus for your help. After two years as a foreman on Crae, you may have the privilege of returning to your headquarters as the famous captor of a number of the ringleaders of this infamous kidnapping ring. That is, you can claim that they are ringleaders. Acclaim as a hero in your profession . . . that is what is in it for you. Now how do you feel about it?"

Marco smiled slowly, made the merest motion of licking his lower lip. "I'll take the chance," he said. "I actually believe you would have a use for me when double-crossing of your crew becomes financially desirable to you. What are your orders . . . boss?"

"Recruits are not free of the ship. Gorbo will show you to your quarters and the sections to which you will be limited. He will also superintend your training. You will take his orders as being mine for the present. And there will be no retaliation for his lash! That was under my orders. That is all." He called again, "Gorbo!"

The man entered, looking at Jones questioningly.

"Gorbo, Neery is now a recruit. I turn him over to you."

"Come along, rook," said Gorbo. "Let's get going." He slapped Marco on the shoulder and Marco had all he could do not to flinch when the heavy hand hit the welt of the lash. "No hard feelings, huh?"

They left the room.

CHAPTER IV—PURGATORY PLANET

ON THE surface of a tiny planet in a system as yet uncharted by the Space Patrol, men toiled in the blazing sun of noonday. A hundred gangs moved about a hundred tasks. Primitive yokes across strong bare shoulders bore buckets of water up to a massive reservoir. Here a sweating man guided a plow pulled by the efforts of four straining backs: along the path at the edge of the dusty clearing, a team of thirty men moved a vast block of dark gray stone toward the rising walls of the reservoir. Only work sounds broke the sullen silence—the scrape of the great block, the creak of the unwieldy plow, the jingle of harness, the occasional chink of the iron bands which each worker wore about wrists and throat, and the crack of an overseers lash.

Arnaud Grath—shifting the chafing rope that bound him to the great stone—had not heard the voice of man for seventeen days except the rare groan or curse that brought the lightning cut of the lash. Seventeen days of dragging block after block to the growing wall, days broken only by the morning and evening meals of thin stew and gritty bread, days separated only by the dreamless slumbers of exhaustion, alone on the ground chained to a block of the same gray stone that he drew all day.

He wondered dully whether Aleesa, too, wore out her strength at some such

task. He had seen a few bedraggled women but had not recognized her lithe form among them. Perhaps she cooked the tasteless bread or even wove the rough gray cloth which formed breechclouts for a number of the men. His own patrol uniform was already in rags, stiffened by the sweat, blood, and dust. Macklure had said that she should dance for the Ones of Crae, apparently a brutal, ironic joke.

But was it a joke? Slaving to Crae, he had turned the thought over in his mind for many days, must be an expensive proposition. Macklure would not waste his time on it for no return; the mere cost of transportation was tremendous. Surely there was nothing to prevent the Ones from transporting machinery at half the price, if they knew about machinery, that was. A few levator-tracs would have finished the plowing in a day, the construction in a week. Even a Martian *grox* was a more efficient harness beast than a man.

Crack! The lash scarcely missed his knotted back, and he felt the rope bite into his shoulder as he jumped forward. The overseer moved up the triple line of men, snapping his whip threateningly, never striking a man hard enough to break the shuffling rhythm. As he returned down the line, Arnaud distinguished a strange, irregular, somehow familiar cadence in the continual cracking of the rawhide. His own Space Guard Call-number! He raised his head a little and opened his eyes, habitually half shut against the dust and glare, and glanced sidewise at the overseer as he passed.

The face that met his startled gaze was the face of Marco Neery.

In his amazement, Arnaud tripped and almost fell. The whip screamed through the air, but the cut on his side seemed slight as he stumbled on. As Marco moved on down the line, Arnaud again recognized his own call number. And then his name in the Guard Code. He plodded on, listening intently.

Arnaud . . . Arnaud . . . will . . . contact . . . soon . . . prepare . . . for action. The whip snapped and bit. *Nod . . . if . . . understand.* Arnaud bobbed his head violently as if irritated beyond sense at the iron collar. Marco moved behind the lines of struggling men, lashing and kicking at them. Arnaud could feel renewed strength pouring through his veins along with the knowledge of Marco's presence.

But how could it be that Marco was among the overseers and not another draft animal like himself? He could scarcely wait for the answer. His tongue fumbled across the transmitter inside his jaw; his body responded to his excitement by an increase in pace, a sign of terrific impatience; this made him break the lock step, and the great block of stone slowed in its progress as men stumbled and tugged. There was no answering voice in his ear—only the meaningless crackle that had irritated his brain since his landing on Crae. The collar jerked on his neck, and Arnaud forced his attention to regaining the steady plodding of the weary team.

ALEESA woke from drugged stupor to find herself bending over a pot of greasy soup, stirring listlessly. Glancing around, she became aware of the glare of the sun, the strangling dust, the torrid gray landscape, the heavy smell of

sweat mingled with the reek of some aromatic herb in the soup. Immediately ahead of her about fifty feet away rose a low stone platform, and beyond it she could see across the plain a half-finished stone tower. Near her other women squatted before similar fires stirring similar pots; while a few simply sat, looking dully into the fires. Aleesa spoke to a woman beside her who was trying to comb her tangle of ash blonde hair with her fingers.

"Where am I and what am I doing here?" The drug was clearing from her mind and she stood up. "I am to dance for the Ones of Crae!"

She glanced down at her robe. The sheer green tissue was worn to a few ragged green tatters, grimly and unconcealing. She stamped in fury.

"Well, do something! I am Aleesa!"

The woman whom she addressed did not move, did not look up. "You'll dance," she murmured in a voice almost inaudible. "But not the way you think. Get down and stir the soup."

Aleesa paid no attention. She called demandingly, "Who is in command here? I must be taken to the leaders!" She took a firm step toward a grey stone shelter in the opposite direction from her fire, only to be almost choked by the iron collar around her grimy neck. She was chained to a block near the spot where she had awakened.

A woman dressed in clean shorts and silver tunic came running out of the shelter. "Who spoke? You?" she headed for Aleesa.

"Yes, I spoke. I demand to know why I am chained here like a beast."

"Silence! I do the demanding here!" The dark agile woman reached Aleesa and cuffed her on the side of the head. "Get down there and shut up. You slave!" Her voice was stinging as her flat hand.

Stunned, Aleesa knelt before the pot. The woman cuffed her again. "And don't let that swill burn, either," she taunted.

Aleesa reached forward wildly and grabbed the other's ankle, pulled her down beside her and poured the scalding contents of the ladle over her tormenter's head. The woman screamed and three more, also in silver tunics, came running out of the shelter. Seizing Aleesa by her lank black locks, her wrists, and heels, they shook her and then dropped her heavily on the ground while they helped their comrade back to the shelter.

Aleesa looked around. Not one of the other women on the ground had so much as looked in her direction. The woman nearest her spoke under her breath again. "I said you'd dance. You'd better get back to work or we'll all get it worse than that."

The dancer pulled herself up and looked at her pot. It was about to boil over. She picked the ladle off the ground and wiped it sullenly on her ragged skirt and put it back into the soup.

She began to sob.

Her neighbor spoke again, watching the shelter out of the corner of her eye. "Shut up," she said apathetically. "They won't come back for a while and it's time for the men's dinner. I'll get a chance to tell you about all this tonight."

Across the plain a cloud of dust thicker than the haze could be seen approaching the group of women and the food.

Three women rose and came for the pots, showing that they were not chained like the cooks, although their clothes were no less ragged, their appearance no less hopeless. They carried the pots by hooks through the handles to the stone platform, then returned to hunch dejectedly near the chained slaves. Other slaves came out of the shelters like dogs on leashes, controlled by the firm hands of silver-tunicked girls, carrying trays piled up with small loaves of grayish bread. These they emptied on the platform and retreated whimpering to the dirty, stinking shelters.

The men ate wolfishly, grabbing for loaves, dipping the bread into the soup and biting off huge hunks. Aleesa could see the ropes that bound them together, could even make out the welts on backs and thighs where the whips had bitten through tired flesh. She sat, head in her hands, then, and wept silently.

Four fresh overseers came out of the shelter and approached the mass of gorging men. With flailing whip butts, they drove the laborers back the way they had come, while the overseers of the morning swaggered back to the shelter.

The women who had taken the pots out brought them back and set them before the women who had tended them. Each woman grabbed her ladle and began scraping the bottom of her vessel for the few drops that remained. Aleesa felt hunger grind within her and reached automatically for her ladle to do likewise; but the odor of the soup was so strong that she felt nauseated at the first taste and with the second slumped on the ground in a faint.

As she came to, she heard her neighbor's dull voice saying to the woman beyond her, "She says she's a dancer, so she ought to be in good enough condition for months of this. I'd faint, too, if I thought they'd take me out and bury me."

Aleesa did not catch the reply; but, in regaining her squatting posture, saw the tunicked women coming from the door of the shelter.

"Come along, you," the leader spoke to the woman next to the dancer. "We heard you talking, and you've been here long enough to know better. On your feet!"

They unlocked her chain from the block and jerked her up. She screamed and resisted frantically as she was forced toward the door of the shelter.

Only when the group was out of sight did another woman whisper sibilantly, "There goes Peritta. We won't see her again. Let that be a lesson to you." Her Venusian had a strong Earthian accent.

"Where are they taking her?" Aleesa wanted to know.

"To the Ones, they say. It must be pretty bad."

"Do they take everyone who talks?"

"I think that's only an excuse. They take others when they haven't caught anybody for a while. They take one every few days. I've been here a long time and they'll probably take me next." She shuddered, but turned greedily to lick the last drops from her ladle.

"Have I been out here very long?" was Aleesa's next whispered question.

"You came on the same ship with me," was the reply, "but you've been sleep-walking all the time till today."

"And they might take me soon, too?"

"They might."

"Then I'm going right now. Nothing could be worse than this." She motioned at the dusty ground, the reeking pots, and stood up.

She kicked her pot as far as she could and threw the ladle after it. Then she grabbed her chain and tugged at the block with all her might, cursing wildly in fluent Venusian. She yelled in fury at the squatting women about her, "Get up, you spineless females! Gang up on those *jtbrassi*" (the most insulting word she could think of) "when they come out here, why don't you?" She could see several of the women in tunics heading for her. "Slug them with your pots. You have the ladles to beat with."

One woman reached her from the front, and Aleesa made a grab for her short wavy hair and pulled, clawing with stubby broken nails at the woman's face.

A ripple of laughter went along the row of squatting women.

Aleesa kicked furiously at the legs of her assailant, but her worn dancing sandal snapped off and she howled with pain when she missed and kicked the chain-block instead.

When three more women approached her and grabbed her from behind, she was easily subdued; but she was dragged from the cooking yard not screaming but still cursing bitterly.

One of the remaining chained women spat in the dust. "Dancers, hah! No brains! Nothing but artistic temperament."

The others laughed again and returned to the last drops of soup.

CHAPTER V — THE WHIP

NIGHTS, like the exhausting days, were short but not cold on Crae; and Arnaud Grath was sleeping on the dusty ground when Marco Neery approached him and unlocked his collar chain from the concrete hitching post which formed his night quarters.

Marco kicked gently at the legs of the sleeper. "Come along," he said gruffly and shook Arnaud's collar.

Sudden pain in his blistered neck woke Arnaud instantly.

"What is it?" he muttered.

"Get up and shut up," returned Marco, giving the collar another jerk.

Arnaud got slowly to his feet. Peering through the gloom he recognized Marco. "Neery," he whispered, "how did you . . ."

"Shut your blasted air-lock, I said," Marco's voice was hard.

He led the silent Space Guard beyond the edge of the sleeping area to where a small group of foremen was gathered.

"Here he is, boys," announced Marco. "Shall we give this noble policeman a working over before we send him to the Ones?"

The group moved off toward a stone shelter like that occupied by the tunicked women.

"I guess that ought to be your privilege as an ex-copper," one of the foremen guffawed. They halted before the door.

"Well, I'm not taking any chances," replied Marco, handing Arnaud's collar chain to one of the others and slipping his whip off his belt.

"You can let him go now, boys," Marco informed them and leapt toward the unsuspecting Grath. His whip circled around his head in the gloom and descended with a resounding crack on Arnaud's raw back.

Arnaud yelped involuntarily and sank to his knees.

Marco's voice was taunting as the lash snapped again, only a fraction of an inch from the scored flesh. He spoke in Guardese, the difficult and semantically precise language known to Guardsmen alone.

"Get up and make like fighting. This may be our only chance to talk," he jeered at Arnaud. "Radios blanketed by young mineral deposits here," he sneered.

Arnaud rose unsteadily to his feet. "Tell all!" he shouted challengingly. He charged heavily at Marco, fists swinging.

"Others can't see in this dark whether or not I hit you. Make it look and sound good," Marco returned the challenge, flicking the whip just to the left of Arnaud's closed fist.

That fist seemed to sink into Marco's midsection.

"Oof!" he grunted. "You're going to the Ones."

"Race? Characteristics? Motives?" The flat of Arnaud's other hand smacked the side of Marco's leatherene jacket resoundingly.

"Non-humanoid, telepathic, don't know!" was the enraged reply. "Make contact with them pronto. Know they pay slavers in jewels and radioactives mined here." He retreated somewhat to get full play for the snapping lash, which cracked all around Arnaud.

Arnaud watched for an opening, waded in again. "How do you get your orders?" he growled, as he dove for the other's feet.

"Toneless human voice on loudspeaker," mumbled Marco as he sprawled above his tackler. He added a few choice Martian oaths, and the watchers roared with laughter.

Catching Arnaud's heel, he pulled up and back. Arnaud howled, not simply pretending. "Careful, you big ox!"

Marco swivelled his body around and, holding the shoulder of the prone man against the ground, pummeled the hard earth beyond Arnaud's head. "Look out for hypnosis. Voice on speaker resembled trance tones." He jumped agilely to his feet and grabbed the butt of the whip from where it dangled on its wrist thong. Cracking the lash again and again at the figure on the ground he added, "Imperative make personal contact with Ones!"

Arnaud groaned, tried to rise to hands and knees, fell back.

The whip swished around him again. "Make no escape attempt unless in life danger," Marco snarled, kicking at the nearly motionless figure. "Will attempt contact soon again."

There was no response from Arnaud. Marco turned triumphantly to the applauding foremen. "Drag him along, you guys," he told them disgustedly. "There's no more fight in this one."

One of the others grabbed Arnaud's leg and pulled him toward the shelter.

"A tasty bit of beef for the Ones," Marco remarked callously, as they progressed.

"Probably," agreed the dragger.

"Probably not," offered one of the men. "I've never seen any signs of bones. As a matter of fact, those we send to the Ones never show up anywhere that I know of."

Marco thought of the amnesia victims on far planets, but said nothing.

"Shut up unless you want to go find out," warned a third man. "You know they can hear us anywhere. They got Jom Parrish a couple of weeks ago."

The men entered the shelter with their burden, dragged him across the large room and opened the double door of what was apparently a closet.

"Is he completely out?" one of the men prodded Arnaud.

The only response was a slight twitch in the shoulder.

"He's OK," Marco secured the collar chain to a ring in the floor of the 'closet.' Then he pressed a boss at the side of the door and the floor of the closet sank down and out of sight bearing the motionless body into the darkness below. The men closed the doors and returned to a table on one side of the room, where cards and chips showed that a game of five-hand *jammo* had been prepared.

One of them glanced up at the black speaker cone hanging in one corner. "Business before pleasure," he said, as they re-seated themselves around the table. "Your copper pal wasn't very tough," he remarked to Marco.

Marco held up his fist, knuckles bleeding where they had repeatedly struck the ground. "He wasn't very tender," he said truculently. "You want to try and see whether a Guardsman can be tough?"

"I didn't mean you," parried the other quickly. "What were you two yelling at each other?" he asked shuffling the cards.

"Pretty names like traitor and baby-face."

Tension at the table eased, and the game was begun.

TO Arnaud Grath, alert and wary, the elevator descent through the darkness gave time for momentary reflection. He was going to the Ones, who, according to Marco, could read his mind. He was supposed to be unconscious. Then he might as well be. In the same manner in which Neery had summoned blanket-sleep, Arnaud relaxed, wandered into a chosen dream of Aleesa and the dance of the Sea People.

He awakened instantly, however, when a sharp jar of the elevator floor bounced him and bright light from the opening door penetrated his closed lids. Subdued voices spoke near him. "Easy now. Get that cart closer to the elevator." He heard his chain being unfastened and then felt himself being rolled to a softer surface. He groaned as his back touched it.

"He looks in bad shape," a man's voice said. "Put him in the first healing bath without trying to cut off those rags."

Arnaud felt the padded cart rolling under him, smoothly along an even floor; and he became aware of a sharp medicinal odor. Memory surged back of an appendectomy he had had in his teens. Sheeted, he had progressed down the hospital hall on such a cart as this and the same smell had permeated the air.

The cart slowed gently to a stop, and Arnaud opened his eyes. He saw for a moment the white-robed arms which lifted him from the cart and into the liquid of a tiled pool. An arm under his neck kept his head out of the warm and infinitely soothing currents that flowed over, around, and across his grimy and lacerated body. Anesthetic seeped into his tissues through unhealed lash cuts.

Now he sank into real unconsciousness.

He awoke at last in utter painlessness. He opened his eyes and saw by the subdued lighting that he was in a room of simple luxury. He lay upon a soft couch covered with a velvety pile of deep crimson.

He rose on his elbow to find himself facing a table on which was laid forth a tray of fruits, bread, and a glass carafe of some sparkling amber liquid. There was no one else in the room. A door facing him stood open, showing a bit of hallway beyond.

Putting his bare feet over the edge of the couch to sit up, Arnaud noticed that he was dressed only in a glistening white loincloth. His legs, his arms, were clean and there was no sign of scars on them. He reached around and felt his back. The skin felt smooth and healthy. He stood up wonderingly. The wrenching ache that had racked his back and shoulders for uncounted days was gone. The Ones of Crae, he mused, must have a medical skill beyond even the advanced knowledge of the Inner Planets of Sol. This cure had been so quick, so complete. No—he sat down again—he had no idea how long he had slept or been drugged. It was quite possible that he had been subject to plastic surgery for months and not known.

In the silence of the room he also noticed that the crackling in his ears was almost gone, too. He might be on a different planet altogether, or the room might merely be well shielded.

One thing was sure, he was ravenously hungry. He would be expected to eat now. But man is by nature wary, curious. He took a quick inventory of the room. The dark red walls were bare of ornamentation except for the band of gentle light about a foot from the ceiling nine feet above him. Upon the deep pile rug, so dark a red as to be almost black, were set his own soft couch and the small carved wood table which held the tray of food. In each corner of the

room there was a tall metal stand, something like a lampstand, from which was suspended—by golden chains—an opalescent globe about six inches in diameter, open at the top. Probably some other kind of lamp, Arnaud reasoned. Otherwise the room was empty.

He rose and approached the open door, through which he could see the opposite wall of a corridor. No one appeared to stop him, and he went through and into the hallway. On the right the hall ended a few feet beyond the door of his room. On the left it stretched away to meet a cross hall at a lighted intersection. There were ten or a dozen doors like his own but closed on the same side of the hall. There was no sign or sound of any living creature but himself.

He returned to his couch and ate with tremendous relish. The fruit was the first he had tasted since his evening with Macklure at the Venusberg; the bread was the opposite of the gritty gray chunks that formed half the fare of the labor gangs. The wine in the carafe he recognized by its subtle bouquet as the finest *shalima* ever pressed from the warm grapes of the Grandes Champs of Palestra. Its cool excitement caressed his lips, his throat.

Suddenly he had the sure knowledge that his pleasure was shared. He was prompted to take another, bigger taste of the wine. As the delicious fire of it seemed to spread through his veins and as he ate again, he had the sensation that he was being subjected to such a sensory draining as was part of the process of making the TAVKO (tactile-auditory-visio-kinesthetic-olfactory) recordings for the most magnificent theatres. But there were no hidden electrodes attached to any part of his nearly naked body.

He rose from the couch and took a last swallow of wine. The sensation of pleasure shared came again. The couch had nothing to do with it either. Setting the flask back on the tray, he went cautiously out the door and down the corridor to his left. He felt completely alone again. Near the intersection, he had a slight recurrence of a feeling of being watched, but there was no one there—on either corner, where the corridors met, was another of the sparkling spheres like those in his room. One was really a lamp, for it glowed; the other was not lighted but reflected darting flecks of color from within its polished surface.

Here Arnaud could see that the left branch of the corridor was a dead end about forty feet away like the one from which he had come. The right branch turned about twenty feet from him, and the wall at the turn was lighted dimly as by some source of light at a distance.

Following the carpeted passage around this second turn, Arnaud found himself at the edge of a luxuriant garden. He looked up and saw that the light which flooded the flowering plants and short clipped grass beneath his feet came from square panels of light set into a vast and lofty ceiling. Pausing for a moment, he observed the dark green walls stretching away on either hand, noticed without thinking the row of golden brackets supporting more of the crystalline globes along those walls.

At first he saw no one in the garden; but as he advanced, his eyes caught a glimpse of motion through the leaves of tall ferns which grew in clumps among

the flowers and made it impossible to see very far ahead. Crouching, he progressed stealthily to the edge of a small grassy clearing. And there Aleesa danced again the Farewell of the Sea People of Venus!

CHAPTER VI—DANCE OF DESIRE

GLIMMERING points of light in the gauzy green of her swirling skirt leapt and sparkled as she twirled and turned and dipped. Her bare feet, like Arnaud's, made no sound upon the turf.

Arnaud's eyes ranged the clearing and beyond, but there was no audience-visible. Only when Aleesa's body dropped motionless in the final salaam of the dance did he speak her name.

"Magnificent, Aleesa," he called, rising and making the handclasp gesture of approval.

She looked up, startled, rose poised on her toes for flight.

"Officer," she gave a glad cry, "you are the officer who was with me when I was stolen away." She sprang toward him holding out her hands.

"Arnaud Grath, Galactic Guardsman," he smiled grasping her hands in his own. "Have you been dancing so ever since I last saw you?"

"Oh, Arnaud, it has been horrible!" Her hands fell to her sides. "I have been a dirty slave, despised, miserable." She told him in considerable detail of the collar and chain, of the dust and the reek of the soup, and of the other filthy and contemptible women who squatted to tend it.

He listened attentively, making her sit comfortably on the grass beside him, as she recounted a tale that so closely paralleled his own, patted her shoulder when she broke into tears over the state of her degradation, and finally held her close as she spoke of the insults heaped upon her by the tunicked warders as they lashed her to an elevator similar to that by which Arnaud had descended below the surface of Crae, and of her panic when she had been forced into the waters that put her to sleep.

"And since then," she spoke of her awakening in a green room in the green dancer's robe, "I have eaten and slept, eaten and slept always in fear. Twice I have danced here thinking to forget what they said, that the Ones of Crae would soon consume me." She burst into shuddering sobs.

"Have you seen the Ones?" Arnaud wanted to know.

"I have seen no one but you," she replied, wiping away the tears with the back of one slender hand. "I have been in this garden, dancing and swimming in the pool," she gestured with the graceful hand, "returning to my room to eat and sleep when I was weary. There has always been fresh food there, but I have seen no living being except the two white-robed women who first put me into the sleep bath. I have called and screamed by the hour, but there has never been an answer."

Arnaud reflected privately that her terror couldn't have been the numbing, paralyzing emotion she had described if she had been swimming and dancing with the abandon which he had just witnessed.

"And now you have come to save me," she said pleadingly. "Haven't you?"

"Save you from what?" Arnaud replied, teasingly, his mind active with remembrance of the draining of sensation he had experienced while breaking his fast. "Do you believe that the Ones mean to eat us whole and are fattening us up like festival poultry?"

Aleesa shuddered. "I just try not to think about it," she answered bursting into tears again.

Arnaud rose and, taking Aleesa's hand, pulled her up beside him. "Aleesa," he stated confidently, "I don't think we're in any immediate danger. But we must stay near each other. If anyone or anything is going to attack you, I shall defend you." He smiled down at her. "But you must stop being afraid at once. Fear makes clear thought impossible, and we must think if we are to avoid danger."

Aleesa smiled tremulously up at him. "I feel safer already, now that you are here," she admitted.

Arnaud laughed aloud. What was it the admiral had said, weeks and parsecs ago? Corny theatrics? "Aleesa," he asked suddenly serious, as he saw her growing indignation at his laughter, "have you ever had the feeling that there was someone watching you—dancing or eating or swimming with you?"

She looked away sulkily and twisted a frond of fern. "What if I have?" she wanted to know, then added, "There has been no one here."

"It's not important," Arnaud lied. "Show me the pool. There may be someone there this time. After all, if we are here, there may soon be others."

Aleesa darted off among the clumps of ferns and scarlet flowers. "This way," she called back, and Arnaud raced after her. He could think of no reason for her haste, but followed obediently.

He caught up with her on the edge of a great tiled pool whose bluish waters lay placidly, reflecting the fulgor of the ceiling light. She had flung off the sparkling green robe and appeared ready to dive into the water clad only in the briefest of white garments. He caught her around the waist and both of them fell splashing and laughing into the pool.

She pulled herself clear of his arms, tossing back her floating black locks. "What were you trying to do, drown me?" she demanded.

"Why did you run from me?" he countered.

She looked at him puzzled as she moved arms and legs to keep afloat. "I don't know," she answered. "I . . . just . . . well . . . felt like running."

Arnaud swam toward her. "And how do you feel now?" he wanted to know.

"Don't you wish you knew?" she flung back and performed an exquisitely balanced surface dive.

He watched the course of her body beneath the clear water and followed above. When she rose, he clutched at her again, but she slipped away and, laughing derisively at him, streaked for the other end of the pool. As Arnaud's powerful strokes broke the surface, he felt the strong sucking within his brain again, the sensation of an open tele-receiver with a fascinated listener

at the other end. At the opposite side of the pool, Aleesa had pulled herself out of the water and now sat on the edge kicking her legs gleefully and splashing the approaching swimmer unmercifully.

"Hey, Aleesa, stop it." He pulled himself up beside her. "I think I know how to find the Ones, if you'll help me."

She faced him pouting. "I don't want to find them. I thought you were going to keep them away from me."

"If we find them, they may be willing to let us go. Don't you want that?"

"But won't they want to keep me to dance for them?" She drew herself up proudly. "Macklure said . . ."

"Do you still believe anything that slaver said? Besides, I think the Ones have already seen you dance. They are right here somewhere."

The dancer darted a frightened glance around the garden, across the pool. "Where?" she asked him apprehensively. "I haven't seen anybody here but you, let alone a bunch of old men with lobster claws at the ends of their arms?"

"Crae-Fish?" he hooted. "Is that what you think the Ones are like? You're in for more of a surprise than I thought. Now think," he requested seriously. "When you ran away from me, when you swam away, when you splashed me, didn't you feel that you were being urged to do those things by some outside force?"

She nodded.

"Pay attention now and tell me what you feel."

He suddenly reached for her, lifted her chin with one hand and kissed her lightly on the lips.

Startled, Aleesa began to push him away, then drew him into a close embrace. The draining of his sensations, his very emotions, was so intense that he almost blacked out. After the long moment, he looked at Aleesa who had gone limp in his arms.

He laid her gently down on the edge of the pool and scooped up a handful of water with which he bathed her face.

She stirred and sat up, looked at him wonderingly. "I have never been kissed like that before."

He grinned down at her. "I wish I could take the credit for it," he admitted sheepishly. "That was the Ones of Crae getting the most out of a good thing."

"Yes," she reflected. "Someone else enjoyed that even more than I did. I could sense my feelings being snatched away."

"That's what I meant. And that, I think, is what the women meant when they said the Ones would consume you. That's why we're here. The Ones, whoever they are, enjoy our sensations. It's my guess that they get a bigger kick the stronger the sensation; and weeks of torturing labor preceding our present status make our pleasures now more intoxicating. Some philosopher once said that pleasure was the process of moving from a painful state to one less painful; and that's what we're doing."

"Pooh on old philosophers!" Aleesa retorted. "Is this the time to sit and

gab about what some old dodo said a thousand years ago? Kiss me again, Arnaud." She offered her tempting mouth.

"Not yet, you witch. This is important!"

She drew back, offended. "Go on then, but don't think you'll get another chance."

"You didn't really want me to kiss you. That was the suggestion of the Ones," he informed her.

"Oh is that so!" she retorted, rising to her feet and procuring the diaphanous green robe from its fluffy heap on the grass and slipping it over her head.

Arnaud still sat, regarding the smoothing water, his hands clasped about his knees meditatively. "Telepathic power is something like light," he went on. "It usually varies inversely with the square of the distance."

"Indeed?"

"Of course," he did not notice her sarcasm, "so that indicates how we are to find the Ones."

"You'll do it without my help, whatever it is," she told him flatly. "I'm going back to my room till you get over this attack of philosophy and math."

"Oh no you're not." He got up and started for where she was giving a final wriggle to settle the filmy skirt.

She avoided him and ran lightly back across the vast garden the way they had come, leaping over low clumps of bright blossoms, dodging the great ferns.

In what seemed the middle of the garden, he caught her, kissed her briefly, let her go while he frowned thoughtfully, gauging the strength of the pull on his mind. It was less forceful than it had been at the pool.

Returning to the chase, Arnaud soon caught Aleesa again, where she had stumbled and half fallen. He lifted her to her feet, kissed her and pondered anew. Obviously Aleesa had stumbled under the influence of those who wanted her kissed. The mental pull was stronger.

Just before she entered a hallway identical with the one from which Arnaud had entered the garden, he caught her again. Even before he kissed her, he could feel the eager anticipation of someone, something else. This kiss, like their first, nearly rendered the couple insensible.

Arnaud, the stronger mentally, sat Aleesa softly on the grass. "Swoon away," he told her. "I'm on the track."

She huddled down, bursting once more into easy tears. "You fiend!" she stormed, beating the soft grass with clenched fist, as Arnaud, ignoring her, pulled up tufts of flowers, ran his hands over the apparently solid structure of the walls on either side of the door, searched with his eyes the upper portions of the wall for apertures which were not there.

Then Aleesa rose and approached him. Throwing her arms about his neck, she pulled his head down and kissed him. Again the shock was intense and Arnaud easily unclasped her arms and put her back on the grass to continue his search.

As he approached to examine one of the wrought gold brackets with its suspended crystalline ball, Aleesa again flung herself on him. Arnaud reeled with the mental command to make love to her. The rounded contours of her face pressed against his and his arms held her as if never to let go.

This was too much. By an immense effort of will, he grasped her glistening black curls where they hung in cascades down her back, drew her sweet face away from his own, struck her perfect chin with his other fist as one strikes a drowning person who is making difficulties about being rescued. This time she slumped to the ground and was silent.

Arnaud returned quickly to the heavy golden bracket. He peered closely at the ball it supported. He had seen one such ball lit in the hall earlier: but these in the garden were unlit, just like the ones in his room and one of those at the hallway junction. He reached up and took the golden chain off the hook, swung the globe down to look inside the small circular opening in the top.

It seemed filled to the brim with a dark liquid. He started to thrust a finger into it. Then every muscle froze with the instantaneous command that poured in upon him.

Don't touch me!

CHAPTER VII—ONES OF MIND

HE stood, statue-like.

Hang me up at once.

He started to respond, then again exerted his mental force to the utmost to disobey.

"Are you one of the things of Crae?" he asked aloud.

Naturally.

"And all these others?" his head nodded toward the line of globes.

There are two hundred of us here, several thousand of us in the other gardens and rooms.

In each moment of mental answer he felt a slackening of the command forbidding him to move otherwise than to hang up the globe again.

"What if I don't hang you up again but smash the globe?" he threatened.

In the instant when the response came, with a sickening fear, *I should die*, Arnaud sprinted away toward the center of the garden, away from the scores of commands he could feel bursting in from all sides directing him to replace the globe he held.

There, transferring his hold from the chain to the globe itself, he sat down—to make it harder for the One's commands to be easily obeyed.

What are you going to do with me? The mental tone was anguished, pitiful.

Arnaud considered. "I'm going to have a little talk first," he said.

We haven't hurt you, have we? You've been having a good time here, we know. There was the suggestion of a snigger in the thought.

"It's pleasant enough down here," Arnaud admitted, "but how about the pain that preceded it?"

We know nothing about that. Our agents rescued you from it, didn't they?"

"No such thing," Arnaud hotly informed the being in the globe. "They robbed us of our freedom and forced us to do exhausting labor with great pain both of mind and body. On your orders."

Oh, no! The One rejected the thought with shocked indignation.

"Oh, yes!" replied the Guardsman. "For the mere intensification of your pleasure, we have been treated most cruelly. And you have been the cause of it, as you well know from the thoughts of those coming here to you, even if only today when Aleesa told me what had happened to her."

Well, hesitated the being in the globe, we knew that all who came to us had been subjected to pain, but we had no responsibility for that. The Jones and Smith Rescue Company (it was a complicated image when transferred mentally rather than orally) is permitted to use Crae as a base for its altruistic work—is even allowed to do a bit of mining here—in exchange for letting us enjoy the sensations of pleasure and relief of those poor creatures whom it snatches from some unthinkable bondage or from the horrible fate of derelicts in space.

"Then it's Jones and Smith who are responsible for the oppression going on on the surface of Crae?" Arnaud asked skeptically.

Oppression—on the surface of Crae! the One re-thought incredulously. That is not our doing nor could it be that of Smith who lives there and directs the care of the poor survivors and escaped slaves. He is such a considerate and kindly human! ("Beneficently symbiotic" would be nearer to the mental image.) Arnaud could feel the sincerity of the One, and, faintly, the echoing assurance of many other Ones as from a distance.

"What makes you think he's considerate and kindly?" Arnaud wanted to know.

Our experiences with Smith have been pleasant. It was he who prepared these gardens, the curing rooms, and other devices for your enjoyment and ours.

"Maybe we'd better start at the beginning. How did you get associated with Smith in the first place? How do you know of space or the surface of Crae at all, since you seem to have no mobility?" asked the puzzled Arnaud.

A time ago, related the thinker in the globe, the ship of Jones and Smith was disabled on the surface of Crae. Seeking shelter and water, they and their crew members came down the old volcanic tunnels to our great caves, where they also found us where we existed dully in the life-giving springs. We entered their minds, learning of space, and found a new ecstasy in their relief from pain and fear in the security of our caves and the healing powers of some of our springs. While some of the crew repaired the ship, others began to dig about in the tunnels for things they called treasures. Not knowing what they were doing, we were afraid that they would destroy our home; so we took their minds and stopped them. Smith and Jones, seemingly more intelligent than the others, sensed our presence and found us in the springs—communicated with us, and learned what joy their coming had first brought

us and how we feared their blasting near our springs. They went up to the surface then, to confer with others of their company, and returned to offer us new pleasures and opportunities. At first they offered to live on Crae letting us share their thoughts in payment for mining most carefully. We objected that during the time they'd been here their thoughts and responses were getting duller and duller, mostly concerned with digging out and carrying away uninteresting chunks of rock, that there was nothing now to compare with their first pleasures in finding themselves safe and being healed by our water (which, of course, in spite of their desire to do so, we could not permit them to drain off and carry away to other planets). After another surface conference, Smith returned to explain the nature of their rescue operations and to beg shelter on Crae for those poor unfortunates whom they could release from slavery (a horrible state which, they explained, was the frequent condition of their kind) or rescue from the frequent frightful accidents that make space travel so hazardous. We assented gladly to this arrangement; and their engineers and workers came to make some of our tunnels and caves into a place where humans would be likely to find the utmost pleasure and have the sensations most pleasing to us, who, by our own simple cellular structure and nature have no adventures of our own worth mentioning. Smith's men also constructed for us these globes in which we could be transported from cave to cave to be near the source of human pleasure.

We have, of course, permitted Smith to have carried away the rocky debris resulting from the improvement for human uses of our tunnels and caves. And that is how we know that Smith and Jones are kindly and considerate, both of their own species and of us. If they were not—if those who enjoy these gardens were unhappy here—we would immediately take possession of their minds and send them from Crae forever.

Arnaud frowned at the globe. "Your story of Smith and Jones may be true," he admitted, "but since your hypnotic power has difficulty affecting me here in the middle of the garden, I cannot believe that you would be able to send anyone away from the surface of your planet even if you can keep them from mining. If most of your story is accurate, you are completely at the mercy of Smith and Jones, for in controlling the surface, they could drop explosives into your tunnels and destroy you any time that you caused trouble for them."

He felt a sudden tremor of fear communicated to his mind from all sides. The clear thought of the being before him continued.

It is true that we have never tried to send all men away from the surface and perhaps we could not do so if there were fewer of us. However, we have never failed to send away from these lower regions any who displeased us. Even when we cannot force a person hypnotically to do our exact will because of the distance between us, we can make him anxious to leave quickly—like this.

Arnaud felt his skin begin to tingle, then to itch maddeningly. He leapt

to his feet, dancing with pain that stabbed, now into the sole of his foot like a thorn, now into an eyeball like an incandescent lance. Then all pain was gone and he sank back to the grass. He could feel the absence of the mental draining, could sense vaguely the recoil from pain in the many minds that lined the garden.

We do not like to do that, whispered in his mind, but we must have some defense. It was thus that we sent away some of those who have been brought to us whose minds were dull or who seemed to take unaccountable joy in the pain of others. We also made them forget their stay here so that they would never try to return to give us discomfort.

Arnaud lay on the grass, recovering control of his mind and body. "Suppose," he thought vaguely, "that I could prove to you that Smith and Jones have been deceiving you—that they are busy producing the pain which you erase here with such pleasure. What then?"

The answer was such a wave of confusion, of almost-fear, that Arnaud felt dizzy even lying on the ground.

We should have to send them away, came the regretful statement. We could not bear to know that pain existed simply because of our particular needs and desires.

Arnaud had to believe the simple creatures. Whether the belief was the result of hypnosis or not, he had to believe them. They seemed capable only of hope and fear, of pleasure in human pleasure and pain in the presence of human pain, of boredom in the presence of human avarice as well as human problem-solving and intellectual puzzles, for them to test this conclusion, and there was no answering eagerness.

What foolishness, was the only response.

"Do you take pleasure in forcing humans to do your will?" Arnaud also wanted to know.

Humans do not enjoy being forced, was the reply, so we cannot enjoy forcing them to do things they don't naturally want to do.

At this moment, Arnaud became aware of Aleesa calling to him. "Arnaud," her voice rang clearly from beyond the tall ferns, "Arnaud, have they got you?" He could hear her growing fear. "Arnaud, where are you?"

"Here, Aleesa, in the middle of the garden."

She came running to him. He lifted the globe on its golden chain and started toward her. "Arnaud," she panted, then noticed the globe. "What is that and why did you take it down?"

He grinned. "This jar contains a One of Crae," he informed her.

"Smash it!" she demanded.

"No, Aleesa, it loves you. Can't you tell?"

Aleesa stood, stunned. "Loves me?" she said.

As if in answer to Arnaud's statement, a wave of affection swept over the garden.

"Yes, and has enjoyed your dancing just as Macklure promised."

"It does—I can feel it!" She drew herself up to graceful balance on tiptoe, made the deep curtsy of a prima ballerina concluding her cande.

"Go to the edge of the garden and dance for them, then," directed Arnaud, "while I conclude my business with this One."

"Business," she pouted, "men are always full of business. That is why I was always happy at the Venusberg where men had shed business and came to enjoy themselves."

"Would you like to dance there again?" asked the Guardsman.

"Of course, although I must say I like the feeling of being appreciated that I have here now."

"Then dance now and feel appreciated. We may be going back to Venus sooner than you imagine," she was informed.

Bearing the globe, Arnaud accompanied her to the wall where the globes hung, shining, reaching out for pleasure. There he left her, and re-entered the passage which took him to the room where he had awakened.

On the way the One asked, *What was the Venusberg of which the dancer spoke with such desire?*

Arnaud smiled, suddenly struck by an idea. "Perhaps you shall see. Can you direct that one of those from the surface come down to confer with me?"

Assuredly. Do you wish to confront Smith with evidence of his deeds?

Arnaud informed him otherwise—asked for Marco Neery—felt the request go out, echoing mentally from globe to globe down the long passage and further into the rock than he had come.

CHAPTER VIII—BONDSMEN OF CRAE

HE had hardly regained the seclusion of the room when he heard Marco's footsteps coming softly on the carpet.

"Arnaud!" Marco cried, entering the room. "What are you doing in this magnificent place? How did you get free? Have you conquered the Ones?"

Arnaud gestured toward the globe in his hand, toward the four globes hanging in the corners. "These are the Ones, Marco. They need our help."

Marco sat down dumbfounded on the luxurious couch. "They what?"

Arnaud recounted all that the Ones had told him in the garden, with occasional additions by the Five in the room.

When they had finished, Marco collapsed onto the couch holding his belly and roaring with laughter.

"Oh, my noble noggin!" he drew breath. "These are the monsters that are terrorizing the galaxy!" Then he sobered, feeling the distress that his amusement at their simplicity aroused in the Ones.

"Can we confer where they cannot hear us?" he asked Arnaud.

"I am afraid that if we do they will not trust us, now that we have taught them distrust," the other Guardsman replied. "That is what Smith and Jones did, and they know how that turned out."

"What do you suggest, then?" Marco asked.

"I think they should become wards of the Galaxy Guard. As such wards, they could require us to re-administer the mines of Crae to provide them with a safe income."

"We're not businessmen, Arnaud."

"No, but the Guard Administration could probably find somebody."

"This is really up to us, though. And I have an idea," suggested Marco.

"Go on."

"The most competent businessman I know personally is Jones of Smith and Jones. Their organization is really amazing," Marco stated. "They know the resources of Crae—in fact they have certain rights of discovery. They have access now to good markets for the minerals and jewels being mined here. Why not let them keep on with it?"

"But . . . but . . .," objected Arnaud, "their methods are inhuman, anti-social! Are they to be rewarded for piracy and crime?"

"Their methods *were* criminal," Marco corrected. "I know Jones, and I am quite sure that he'd much rather dispense with the slavery angle in favor of more economic machines."

"What about Smith, then? He's been the moving spirit behind the forced labor on the surface. He must like it. He must be a sadist from the word jet."

There was a wave of strong opposition, of contradiction from the Ones.

"No, Arnaud, I don't think so. You remember what the Ones here told us about not being able to bear the presence of sadists. Smith is merely another clever businessman who, merely incidentally, has used sadistic overseers to produce pain and terror in the laborers. It is probably true that he doesn't feel pain like our friends here, but not that he likes it."

"But what would you tell them? How would you cut them in on a continuing profitable business without at the same time making them lose all respect for the Galaxy Space Guard?"

"They would never have to know that this is a Guard deal. I would work with Jones personally . . . let him think he'd pulled a smooth transaction. He's really very proud of being cleverer than any particular Guardsman and therefore, he believes, cleverer than the whole Guard put together. If he should be convinced that he wasn't so clever, I think the galaxy would lose a first rate enterpriser."

"You mean you'd let him think you were a criminal, too?" Arnaud's tone was less shocked than dubious.

"Oh, that's all right," laughed Marco. "He already thinks I am. How do you think I turned up as a foreman instead of in chains like you? I was supposed to get gobs of glory out of this by eventually bringing in some of his henchmen as prizes to the Guard. He'll string along with anything I choose to tell him."

Again there was communicated to the two men a wave of shock from the Ones. *Untruth—you would lie to our friends Smith and Jones? How can we trust you if we know that you lie to others?*

"This time," Marco told them, "there would be no real lie. At last they, too, could stop living a lie to you. Relieved of the necessity of producing terrorized, pain-wracked humans for your pleasure, they could proceed on the terms they know and enjoy best—pure business."

But what about our pleasures? was the united thought of the Five.

"They take no joy from forced actions," Arnaud reasoned to Marco. "And if they were separated, the galaxy would stand in no danger from them as potential dictators."

"But you know the prevailing prejudice against telepaths throughout the galaxy," Marco reminded him.

Arnaud spoke thoughtfully. "Don't you remember," he gave only the vaguest of clues so that the Ones should never know clearly the methods and aims of the Space Guard, "the special orders of the last lecture? We must make this decision and take action."

"Yes," admitted Marco doubtfully.

"Then think! Where, on all the circling planets inhabited by men are the spots where pleasure and the constant relief from worry and pain are to be found?" urged Arnaud.

"Libraries? Hospitals? Homes? Bars?" suggested the puzzled Guard.

"That's right . . . the last. In bars and clubs like the Venusberg! The Ones would be happy there, wouldn't they?"

"But the fights, the degradation of the addicts . . ." Marco objected. "These creatures could never stand it."

"Who could fight if commanded otherwise by the ones?" said Arnaud triumphantly. "And who would overindulge if a sudden itching drove him out of the place? Relaxing quietly in empty *thiska* bottles on the shelves, these Ones could have more fun than anybody," Arnaud was carried away, "and if they got bored in any particular bar, they could direct some interesting specimen of humanity to buy them from the barkeep and take them elsewhere." His mind filled with pictures of the most luxurious inns of the systems, where thronging sybarites ate, drank, danced, and feasted their eyes on the voluptuous posturings of beautiful entertainers.

Approval of the Ones was instantaneous and powerful.

Marco might have resisted their pleading if he had so desired, but he could only laugh and admit that Arnaud's plan was sound.

"In the name of the Space Guard," he pronounced solemnly, ritually, "I pledge to aid in the infestation of the Galaxy by the Ones of Crae."

TINY bubbles of pulsing red-orange light and the heavy fumes of *thiska* filled the air between the table where Arnaud Grath and Marco Neery sat and the other tables in the crowded Venusberg Club. Smoke from Arnaud's *theel* tube drifted hazily across the table above the half full *thiska* glasses and the two bottles.

Tossing his scarlet-lined cape back across his shoulder, Arnaud rose. Lifting one of the bottles, he signalled with it to one of the green-robed native waiters. The man approached.

"Mark this bottle for my private use," he told the waiter. "Keep it at the bar, but separate from the general stock."

The Venusian bowed his assent sinuously and backed away bearing the new home of a One of Crae.

"Like to come back and meet Aleesa?" Arnaud gestured to the tiny stage where the balipsa players were performing the final haunting trills that signalled the end of the dance—where the shimmering green billows of her skirt sank floorwards with Aleesa's final bow.

"It sounds charming," agreed the pleasantly thiska-befuddled Neery.

The two men made their slow way among the tables to the little door. The usually wary Venusian beside it knelt with an excess of gratitude to Arnaud.

"You are the *ghurba* of us all," the slender servant proclaimed, abasing himself. "You have rescued our princess, our *sheesa*."

Arnaud waved him to rise. "It was nothing," he said gallantly.

Marco held his breath to keep from laughing, as they progressed triumphantly down the passage.

As Arnaud broke the strands of flame and entered the room, Aleesa ran toward him, then stopped, seeing Marco.

"Arnaud, *sheesa*," she cried.

"Aleesa, this is my *ghurba*, Marco Neery, who assisted me in freeing the bondsmen of Crae. His ship carried back hundreds of weary laborers from the dusty plains as mine brought you." He did not add, as he might have, "and five thousand bottles of Ones."

"A friend of Arnaud's . . .," she smiled. "Has he seen me dance?"

As she twirled again before the great mirror, both Arnaud and Marco caught sight of the sparkling crystal decanter on her low table beside the little brass bell, both felt the welcome of the One inside, both smiled.

"I have seen you dance, most graceful lady," said Marco.

"Then you may kiss my hand," Aleesa was gracious. Marco complied with pleasure.

"And you, Arnaud?" Aleesa pouted a little, sweetly, her lips pursed for a kiss or a scolding, "are you still too occupied with business?"

Arnaud swept her into his arms, put his mouth to hers.

A Space Guardsman behaves always as is expected.



THE TALK OF THE SCIENCE-FICTION WORLD—DIANETICS!

Read the thought-provoking controversy in this issue of MARVEL,
as L. Ron Hubbard, Theodore Sturgeon and Lester del Rey lock horns!
Read it on page 111.

Second Advent

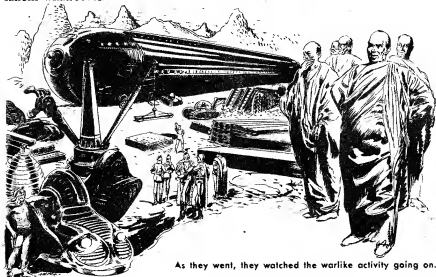
by MACK REYNOLDS

Within three hours of their landing on Alpha Centauri's third planet, the Hiroshima crew had thrown up a fortress capable of warding off the attack of any weapon ever known to man. And then the natives, the Plemethian robots, appeared. . . .

THE battle cruiser *Hiroshima* approached Alpha Centauri's third planet with caution. Unexpectedly, it was inhabited; unexpected, but not unprepared for.

A thousand miles off, the cruiser went into orbit, then disgorged two scouts which approached the planet and circled it. After several days the scouts reported no signs of space or air travel.

The *Hiroshima* descended to within ten miles of the surface and opened its ports again to release twenty fighters. They sped about the strange planet photographing and scouting, their pilots in continual touch with the intelligence officers aboard the battle cruiser. Four days later, Commander Jefferson was able to report to Captain Sunder that there were no obvious signs of military installations whatsoever.



As they went, they watched the warlike activity going on.

The captain called in his staff for consultation. One group held out for immediate destruction of all inhabitants on the grounds that they might possess secret weapons; but the majority were of the opinion that conditions obtaining were so similar to earth's that the natives might well turn out to be suitable for slavery.

The *Hiroshima* landed gingerly on a small plateau. Seconds after landing, ports opened and twenty caterpillar-treaded hevitanks waddled rapidly out and scooted to take positions in the surrounding hills. Following the hevitanks, space marines poured from the ship, manning bulldozers, small power shovels, and four and six wheeled vehicles of various uses. Within an hour, the plateau was a beehive of activity, seemingly without rhyme or reason. Within three hours, it was a fortress capable of warding off the attacks of the greatest forces with which man had as yet come in contact.

The plateau and the surrounding hills were still being consolidated when the Plemethian delegation approached in a landcar. The group's progress from the nearest city, approximately fifty miles away, was noted and kept close track of from the beginning. A fighter hovered above it, following carefully until the car reached a roadblock. The ground forces then took over.

Captain Sunder himself received the report of the commander of the hevitank. "Well?" he snapped.

The lieutenant was wide-eyed. "Sir, a delegation of eight of this planet's inhabitants have arrived at my post and requested permission to see you."

Captain Sunder snorted sarcastically. "Can you speak their language already?"

"Yes, sir. That is, sir, they speak Amer-English."

"What?"

"Yes, sir. And they look human."

"Are you drunk?" Sunder roared. "This is the first Terran expedition to reach Alpha Centauri. How could they possibly speak Amer-English?"

The lieutenant didn't answer.

The captain glowered at him for a full minute. "Strip them for a complete search; then send them on in one of our vehicles. Theirs is to proceed no further than your post. While they are here, go over their landcar and discover what you can of its nature."

Captain Sunder switched off the visor, snorted, then rang for his chief of intelligence.

As the hevitank commander had reported, the delegation was human in appearance and dressed in toga-like garments that gave them the dignified aspect of Roman senators of old.

The senior of the group acted as spokesman. "Welcome back to Plemeth," he said, sounding as though he were on the verge of being overwhelmed by emotion.

Captain Sunder scowled at him questioningly. "Where did you learn Amer-English? What's this 'welcome back' nonsense?"

The Plemethian spoke again, softly. "The masters warned us that when you

came again you might not know of the first arrival on Plemeth. Let me explain. I am Harid and these my associate governing robots of Hope, man's first city on this planet . . ."

"Robots! Why, you're as human in appearance as I."

The Plemethian bowed his head in humility. "Forgive us, master. It has been so long since man blessed us with his presence and it has been our vanity to construct ourselves in his image. Our bodies are now almost identical to man's, even to sensations and emotions."

Sunder snorted. "All right, go on."

"The planet Plemeth was discovered by man more than three hundred years ago. The spaceship contained but thirty refugees . . ."

"Refugees?"

"From the wars on Terra, master; fleeing from the destruction that was everywhere."

Commander Jefferson, cold eyed, leaned over Sunder's desk and whispered, "The captain will recall the Dalton expedition of 2068. Conscientious objectors, religious fanatics, and other crackpots; they proclaimed themselves citizens of the galaxy, forswore all allegiance to any solar system government, and blasted off into space in an old rocket ship."

Sunder snorted unbelievably, "You mean you think they made it to this point?"

His intelligence chief shrugged. "What other explanation of this?" He indicated the Plemethians with a thumb.

The *Hiroshima's* commander eyed the delegation again. "So Dalton and his gang of screwballs got this far." He grunted in contempt. "Where are their descendants? Back in the city?"

The Plemethian sighed. "Master, they are all gone. The *manblight* destroyed them before the third generation."

The captain half rose to his feet. "The *manblight*! You mean there's some virulent . . ."

"Master, the danger is past. When it became obvious the disease could not be conquered in time to save the lives of those already on Plemeth, they resigned themselves but instilled in us robots the need to continue studying the *manblight* so that when man came again, Plemeth would be ready for his occupancy. We have also built cities, parks, gardens and green forests, for your appreciation. In our humble way, oh master, we have kept the faith, waiting for the return of man."

Captain Sunder stared at Harid in amazement. "You're the damnedest robots I ever saw. Where'd you get those fruity ideas?"

"Master, the men who first arrived on Plemeth constructed us differently from Terran robots. Implanted in us are the highest ideals that man developed in his centuries upon earth."

Jefferson eyed the Plemethian wolfishly. "And I assume that, like all robots, it is impossible for you to harm a human?"

The robot shuddered. "Of course, master. To serve man is our only desire."

The intelligence chief turned to Sunder triumphantly. "We won't even need a pacification and reconstruction period. We can take over immediately and use this as our base for the conquest of the other Centaurian planets."

The captain nodded thoughtfully, and grunted, "Hmmm . . . yes. There seems to be signs of life on them, and I doubt if they'll be as easy to subdue. This should be an excellent base."

The Plemethians appeared thunderstruck. One said, in horror, "But the first masters said that by time man came again he would have put warfare behind him; that man would have burned himself out as a creature of hate, would have learned his lesson, before he would be able to conquer the stars."

Captain Sunder laughed coarsely. "Jefferson," he rasped, "run these things out, I'm getting tired of their jabber. Order them to provide suitable quarters for myself and senior officers in the city; I'm sick of the confines of the ship."

In their enthusiasm, the Plemethians had at first been blind to the nature of the expedition. Now, when they stepped from the ship, they noted the preparations being made all over the plateau. They were shocked beyond their mental capacities.

Petty Officer Blake, one of the crewmen who had been present, taking notes, at the delegation's reception, brushed by on his way to another task. He hesitated, then turned back to them.

He muttered, furtively, "I'm sorry that happened. All men aren't like Sunder and Jefferson." He turned to go.

Harid stayed him. "We don't understand, master. What has happened? What is the nature of this expedition?"

The other grimaced bitterly. "It's just that the new supermen," he used the term sneeringly, "ran out of planets to enslave in the solar system. Now they're reaching for the stars."

"Supermen? What do you mean, master?"

Blake said, "Yeah, supermen. Dalton and his group of refugees were wrong if they thought man would burn himself out in his solar system wars and finally turn to a better life. We'd just about reached that point when this superman gang made their bid."

"Then you mean that a small minority conquered and now controls the solar system?" Harid asked.

"That's right. They developed a form of armor that neutralizes atomic weapons. Nuclear fission fails to take place in its vicinity."

"And this small group, these supermen, were able to dominate the whole system with the aid of this weapon of defense?" the Plemethian asked in astonishment.

Blake nodded grimly. "They proclaimed that rule must be by an elite, the cream of mankind—by supermen. Of course, it was up to them to decide just who composed the elite and, by a strange coincidence, *they* considered themselves to be the cream of mankind."

"I am surprised there has not been revolt, master"

"Revolt? How can we?" Blake said bitterly. "The *Hiroshima* alone is strong enough to destroy the rest of the whole Terran fleet, and if we could capture it, we of the crew could free the solar system. But it's impossible. They wear their armor continuously, and these days all weapons are atomic. We're helpless."

"How many of these supermen are there on the ship, master?" Harid asked thoughtfully.

"A handful, about thirty of the higher ranking officers..." The crewman broke off, looked anxiously over his shoulder and quickly went on his way.

Commander Jefferson appeared, cold faced, behind them. "I instructed you to return to your city and make arrangements to house the captain and his officers."

The Plemethians bowed their heads in humility. "Forgive us, master," Harid said humbly. He led the way and the others followed him across the plateau. As they went, they watched the warlike activity going on with distress.

THE complete occupation of Plemeth was accomplished in less than a week.

The *Hiroshima* remained the main Terran base, but Captain Sunder, Commander Jefferson and the other ranking officers of the expedition had made their quarters in Hope, the small planet's capital. They found it unbelievably comfortable.

Large apartments manned by staffs of robots were provided, delicacies of food and drink, music and other entertainment. What wasn't at hand was quickly found or produced when demanded. The centuries old dream of the Plemethians had come true; man had returned. All the good things of human life which had been manufactured and then let lay idle, awaiting his second advent, were put to use—for the benefit of the ship's officers.

On the eighth day following the landing and after a staff conference on plans for the conquest of the other Centaurian planets, Captain Sunder was approached by Harid, who bowed deeply to the commanding officer.

"Well, speak up," Sunder rumbled. "What is it?"

"Master, we of Plemeth have prepared for centuries for the return of man. In your mighty ship are hundreds, but thus far we have been permitted to serve but a few. We beg of you to allow all of your fellow men to come to our cities so that we may make life comfortable for them."

The captain sat for a long time staring at the Plemethian. Finally, "It must be your human appearance that throws me off. I keep thinking of you as a man and expect objections to the treatment you've received. Instead you like it." He snorted, an edge of contempt in his manner.

"However," he went on decisively, "your request is denied. My men are soldiers and I have no desire to have them lead too soft a life; besides, we of the elite must keep the rank and file in their place. Good discipline demands harsh measures; only we supermen have the ability to enjoy luxury without being weakened."

The robot said, "Then, master, are we to understand that the Plemethians are allowed to serve only you of the elite? That ordinary man is forbidden our services?"

The captain nodded. "Possibly in the future more of us will arrive from Terra, but for the present only my officers and I will enjoy your, er . . . hospitality."

The Plemethian bowed and turned to go, but then looked back again. "There is to be a banquet tonight, Master?"

The Terran had returned to his papers, but glanced up, annoyance in his face. "What of it?"

"Master, when man was here before he discovered a berry, similar to the grape of earth, with which he made a highly esteemed beverage. Does man still enjoy its taste?"

Sunder scowled. "Beverage?"

"They called it champagne, master."

"Champagne! You mean you produce champagne on Plemeth?"

"For man's enjoyment, master. We Plemethians are but robots, built to serve."

The captain waved his hand in irritation. "I know, I know . . . By all means be sure that a good supply of this Plemethian champagne is on hand tonight. We'll try it. Now get out."

Harid bowed again and backed from the room.

Captain Sunder and most of his officers feasted and drank late that night. They were catching up as rapidly as possible with the long monotonous months of hard life on the space ship. The food was excellent, as always when prepared by the robot chefs; the champagne was superb and flowed—as only champagne can flow. Laughter and song began to echo throughout the Captain's palace.

Commander Jefferson was in the midst of a drunken debate with a gunnery officer. The argument was more nearly a monologue by the chief of intelligence, since he outranked the other by several grades.

"I tell you," he went on blusteringly, "the whole idea is stupid. These fools who worry about the possibility of robots eventually dominating man have completely missed the mark. It's an impossibility. The point is that man makes the robot, and *always* instills in it the basic ruling that it must serve man and under no circumstances harm him. A robot can't alter that fundamental principle any more than a human can eliminate his need for food and water."

The gunnery officer motioned for one of the serving Plemethians to open another bottle of the sparkling wine. "Unnerstan' you perfectly, sir. But perhaps mistake'll be made some day." He held his glass out waveringly to have it refilled.

Jefferson snarled his disgust at the other's stupidity. "There can't be a mistake. Take these Plemethians; they've been here more than two and a half centuries without a man around and still their basic drive is the same. Even the new robots they've built are infused with it. All they want is to serve, serve, serve!"

The other stared at his glass drunkenly. "I must be getting awfully tight. Can hardly move..."

Jefferson shook his head. "Me, too, brain seems clear enough, but I... I'm almost paralyzed." He tried to get to his feet and failed. He shook his head again, his eyes widening with sudden suspicion. This was more than an alcohol bun.

"Drugged," he managed to whisper thickly. With a tremendous effort, he made his voice go louder. "*We're being drugged!*"

His eyes swept the room. Half of the officers were unconscious, slumped on the floor or over the table, the others were in similar shape to himself. He tried to fight the effects of the narcotic and failed; his head was clear but his muscles wouldn't respond.

Harid and two robots entered the room, followed by Petty Officer Blake and a score or more other members of the ship's crew.

Captain Sunder was dead to the world, so the Plemethian addressed himself to the chief of intelligence. "Forgive us," he said. "It was necessary that these masters," he indicated the crewmen from the *Hiroshima*, "be given the opportunity to remove your armor so that they may seize the spaceship."

Jefferson shook his head in a desperate attempt to clear it, and spoke thickly. "This is impossible, it's an attack upon humans. A robot can't..."

Harid held up a hand. "It was difficult, beyond belief, it was difficult. But we of Plemeth were constructed to serve man and it has become evident that to do this the present officers of the *Hiroshima* must be removed and the members of the crew be allowed to take the ship back to the Solar System where its great strength will enable them to replace the government there."

The intelligence chief snarled. "You've attacked those you serve. I order you..."

The Plemethian was still gentle in his speech. "Even you shall benefit by this change we make possible. You have been in the position of slaveholders, and slavery is bad for the owner as well as the slave; both are brutalized. It is degrading for a man to be made a slave; it is also degrading to own them. We have rescued you from that."

Jefferson was rapidly losing consciousness but he made a last effort. "Can't see—how—a robot could force—self to—make—attack on—human."

Petty Officer Blake grinned at the slumped figure of the chief of intelligence. "You brought it on yourselves, Jefferson. You shouldn't have ever let the Plemethians know you consider yourselves supermen; that you were an elite. You see, they were constructed to serve *man*, not *superman*."

Watch for the next issue of MARVEL on your local newsstands about May 1st. We promise you as good (if not better) an issue next time. Better yet, fill out the subscription blank on page 129 and mail without delay!

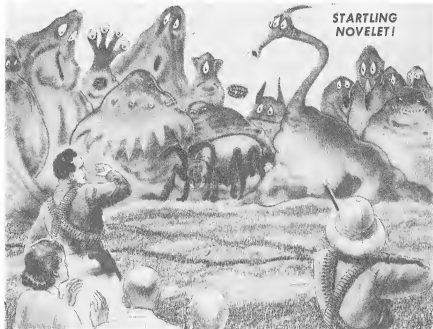
HALLOCK'S MADNESS by WILLIAM TENN

Ransom Morrow was an explorer, yes, but how much curiosity did he really have, old Hallock wanted to know. Enough to invade a land crawling with creatures that very unfortunately were not at all inconceivable, whose greatest horror was that they HAD been conceived? Enough curiosity, in other words, to eat a slightly mildewed dried date? . . .

CHAPTER I

"A most singular case," mumbled Dr. Pertinnet, walking a dignified hop-skotch among the checkered tiles of the sanitarium waiting room. "Can't be unique, of course—nothing's ever unique; must have been someone like Hallock in medical history. Just never recorded."

**THE MAN WHO DARED TO PLUNGE INTO THE DARK RECESSES OF
HALLOCK'S MIND WOULD NEED TO GO ARMED TO THE TEETH!**



Ransom lobbed the grenade at the main body of the creature . . .

Ransom Morrow sighed good-naturedly and heaved himself over to the little doctor. He reached down and plucked at a white sleeve.

"Hey Doc, remember me? I've been recorded. Not in the Psychiatrist's Weekly Monitor, but in your appointment book. Nila said you wanted some help. And now that I managed to get on the subject of Nila, how is she and where is she? My expedition's trotting off to Uganda in a week and I want to do my kissmiss shopping early."

Dr. Pertinnet blinked at him until recognition widened his weak scholarly eyes. "Ransom, my boy! Glad to see you. Miss Budd is taking care of the patient. Hallock—you know Hallock the explorer. She said you once worshipped him; her idea to call you."

"Hallock? Wells W. Hallock?" Morrow whistled a slow bar of recollection. "The greatest of them all. Before Peary, before Johnson, before Livingston. And for sheer dogged searching, before even old Ponce de Leon. Mom used to tear his books out of my hands: I had to read them at night under a blanket with a flashlight. He got me interested in broken cities and forgotten temples. Why if it weren't for Hallock—"

He broke off and stared down at the old man. "What's the matter with him? And what can I do?"

"Trauma! Nothing definite, nothing we can name, but it is quite obviously driving him psychotic. And unlike most cases of this sort, he realizes it and wants help desperately. But he seems to feel that our help is worse than nothing at all; he keeps saying that psychiatry will complete the tragedy that curiosity began; he's resisted all our efforts so violently that we've been forced to resort to—well, to the straitjacket."

Ransom Morrow shook his head. Wells W. Hallock in a straitjacket! Huge, fearless Hallock who had shot his way out of the underground temple in northern India where the original, primitive *Thuggee* was practiced, who penetrated to the vampire cult of Lengluana and took flashbulb photographs! Hallock who had laughed at superstition and dream-fancies and roared his way into the inaccessible, twilight corners of the world!

An attendant was handing a white envelope and a sheet of beworded paper to Dr. Pertinnet. "That's the complete report, doctor," he said. "We checked the original analysis as you requested, but the results were the same. No injurious substances—definitely *Phoenix dactylifera*, however. And we still haven't found the cat."

"Then find her. Find her!" The attendant backed out in a flurry of *sirs* and *buts*. "Valuable experimental animal like that—allowing it to escape, and run around as if—"

"You still haven't told me how I can help."

The doctor stuffed the envelope and paper into a pocket of his gown. "Of course. Fact is, I don't know myself. Miss Budd mentioned your name to Hallock, told him it was his influence that started you exploring. Now, he insists on seeing you. Says only you can help him, understand him. Pretty

usual fixation under the circumstances, except that he never heard of you before. Miss Budd suggested that we call you in any case. He might make a useful slip, if you can win his confidence. I don't see any harm in it, just so you don't get him over-excited."

They walked down a long, silent, antiseptic corridor. Dr. Pertinnet paused before a smooth door.

"Understand," he placed a friendly hand on Ransom's shoulder, "understand, we can't have any affectionate hijinks between you and Miss Budd in that room. This case is difficult enough what with Dr. Risbummer—my predecessor in the case—suddenly taking it in his head to disappear without leaving a trace of his notes. And now the cat. We just can't have any more tomfoolery. Straight scientific investigation."

"Gotcha, Doc," the young man grinned. "I'll save my research on Nila for this evening. Meanwhile, lead on. I'm agape and agog but not aglow."

They entered a large, airy room that shrieked of hospital austerity. A screen, a night table, a small chair and a large bed were its only furniture. Nila Budd, trim, blonde and hygienically beautiful in her starched white uniform, sat on the chair doling spoonfuls out of a china bowl to a weatherbeaten face.

She paused as they came in, and smiled briefly at Ransom. Then dropped the spoon into the bowl and set it on the table near a tiny chest made of incredibly yellowed ivory. She walked up to them while the man lying on the bed watched her curiously out of great, deep-sunk eyes. He seemed strangely free, as if the buttoned sheets which restrained his immense body were somehow not significant, somehow didn't matter . . .

"I did as you suggested with the sedative, doctor," she whispered. "He's been fairly docile all day, no trouble at all. Hello, Ran."

"Hi." He attempted a brief embrace, but she evaded him and walked over to where the doctor stood looking down at Hallock.

"I've brought you an old admirer," the doctor was saying. "This is Mr. Ransom Morrow. Your books inspired him to become an explorer. He's leaving for Uganda next week in search of—of—"

"Of a paleolithic Hamitic civilization around Lake Albert," Ransom finished, walking over to the bed. "I'm honored to meet you, sir."

CHAPTER II

Wells W. Hallock raised his head and stared at the younger man. His hair, cut long and free in the style affected by men of the old West, was no longer the shiny black of a thousand pictures; it was white, thin and straggled. But his eyes were proud.

"And it's an honor to meet you, Mr. Morrow," he said at last in a voice so hoarse that Ransom had to bend over the bed to catch the carefully shaped syllables. "I've heard of your work in North Africa and Ethiopia. But Dr. Pertinnet is very wrong when he says my books made you an explorer. It

was curiosity that did it—divine, satanic curiosity—like the curiosity which brought me to this. Your curiosity, Mr. Morrow—it can save me, do you hear, it can save me! Only we must have weapons—an elephant rifle, machine-guns, machetes, hand grenades—"

"Hallock!" The psychiatrist cut in on the sharply rising voice. "If you go on this way, I'll have to ask Mr. Morrow to leave. Now lie back and relax, that's right, rela-a-ax."

The explorer dropped his head to the pillow. "You had the *Fruit* analyzed, didn't you?" he asked suddenly.

Dr. Pertinnet was flustered. "Y-yes. We did. Surprisingly enough, it contains nothing that might be termed a drug." He set the envelope down on the ivory chest and unfolded the sheet of paper given him by the orderly. "Of course, it's difficult to be certain in its present dried condition, but it appears to be nothing more than a variety of *Phoenix dactylifera*. In other words, a date. Common, ordinary fruit of the date-palm."

"Common, ordinary—"

The man on the bed tilted his chin at the ceiling and laughed soundlessly. "You call the *Fruit* a common, ordinary date! What would you call the Gates of Hell, Doctor—doors or railings? Would you look at them and say, 'Why here's a fence that needs whitewashing?'" He coughed for a moment and continued his feverish whispering. "And what happened when you gave a bit to the cat? Have you found the cat yet?"

"Why, no. How did you know we gave a piece to a cat?" the doctor asked him suddenly. "Has she been in here? We've searched the hospital—nurse, have you seen the cat?"

"No, Doctor," Hallock broke in before Nila could answer, "the nurse hasn't seen the cat. But I have. She's a badly frightened little pussy by now—if she isn't dead. You gave her a pretty large piece, you know. She won't be able to get back. And she hasn't seen any of the larger things yet, just the two-headed snake and the portions of the giant centipede and—"

The doctor leaned over and gripped the explorer's shoulder through the thick sheets. "Where is the cat, Hallock?" he asked in a soothing voice. "Where did you see her last?"

"Here," the man on the bed whispered. "Here. In my head. In my horrible brain. Where I go when you make me fall asleep. Where I meet Dr. Risbummer cowering and gibbering to himself. Only he isn't Dr. Risbummer any more, but a poor mad, crippled thing who clings to me for protection, who begs me not to have nightmares because he's tired of running, because he's afraid he'll fall and get caught sometime."

"Hopeless!" Dr. Pertinnet straightened. "Most unfortunate about Dr. Risbummer's disappearance. Not only don't we have his diagnosis available, but the whole affair has strengthened Hallock's hallucinations. Given them substance, as it were." He moved toward the door. "If we could only find Risbummer!"

"You can, damn it, you can!" Hallock strained against the sheets. "Give him a chance. Just don't stick any more of those needles into me, don't put me to sleep any more."

"I told you there would be no further hypodermics, unless you made them necessary. The sedative for tonight has already been administered; Miss Budd mixed it with the broth she fed you."

Ransom, licking his dry lips, decided he would never forget the look of furious horror that distended Hallock's eyes.

"You fool! You crazy, crazy, *crazy* fools!" He writhed on the solid bed as if he wanted to dissolve through it. "I begged—"

"Now, then, Mr. Hallock," Nila told him. "You do need sleep."

"Sleep!" The massive head dropped back to the pillow. "Oh, go away. Go away."

"Miss Budd," the doctor called as he pushed the door open. "I'd like to see you for a moment."

"Right with you, Doctor." She touched Morrow's arm before slipping after him. "I go off duty in an hour, Ran; hang around and say nice stuff to my patient."

Hallock watched the nurse leave. "Like her a lot?" he whispered.

"Yeah. She's almost as much fun as chinese checkers."

"She's a nice girl. And a good nurse. But she doesn't take to the idea of your wandering off to Uganda and similar points unknown?"

"That's right, sir. Calls it adolescence in longer pants." Morrow dropped to the chair. He was still finding difficulty in associating this heroic wreck with the Wells W. Hallock he had read about—crisp, cynical, fearless . . .

"She may be wrong. And she may be right. There are those among us who walk wide arcs around horror, who obey the simpler, more important precepts of their religion. And then, Morrow, there are the whistling fools who rush in where even fallen angels fear to tread. People like you and people like me, may the gentle God have mercy on us."

His voice was so hoarse that hardly one recognizable sound broke the rhythmic, rustling sentences. Ransom found himself leaning close to the tough, wrinkled face framed on three sides by long white hair.

"I'm sorry," the old explorer chuckled somewhere in his throat. "My voice is hard to hear. You see, I—well, I scream too much."

There was a brief silence while he breathed heavily and fidgeted his head about on the pillow. Down the hall a clock ticked in regular hammer-strokes.

"You're an explorer because you have a curiosity that eats at your insides night and day. But how much curiosity do you really have, Ransom Morrow? Enough to wander willingly through a land that has never been mapped, through a land never meant to be mapped? A land filled with creatures that are unfortunately not inconceivable, whose greatest horror is that they *have* been conceived and exist in the mind of an imaginative, foolhardy idiot! Have you the curiosity to do that, and come to the rescue of a pitiful hulk whom only

you can save before the ministrations of kindly doctors and sympathetic nurses send him stumbling forever into the abyss of the unutterable?" He paused, coughed soundlessly, smiled. "I'm sorry. To leave out the drama, have you the curiosity to eat a slightly mildewed dried date?"

"From there?" Morrow jerked his fascinated eyes to where the white envelope reposed on the ivory chest.

"Yes. From there. It's the Fruit, Morrow, the Fruit of the Tree. "Only you must be careful—you mustn't, like Risbummer—a little—a taste—" His eyes closed as his voice trailed away. Suddenly they opened again and he whispered rapidly as if each word were measured in years of life. "Must help me, Morrow—knives—guns. Gets worse each time. Fools gave—me sedative. Can't fight—tied down—but dangerously close—dangerous—must get help—some way—some—way—" This time his lids slid shut, and his breathing slowed to a sleeping regularity.

Ransom watched the determined muscles of his face relax and grow gentle. Then he rose and tiptoed to the small table.

The chest was well known to any reader of Hallock's books. Given to him by a Buddhist lama for services rendered and friendship tendered, the hard yellow box had once contained the crowning, though fragmentary, jewels of every expedition. It had once held that bit of stone from Java—the earliest artifact definitely known to have been made by human hands; the tiny, primitive steam engine assembled by the priests of ancient Egypt had once rattled against its hard corners. Now?

Morrow picked up the envelope and flipped back the cover of the chest.

A handful of dry olive-shaped objects lay on the creamy surface of the bottom. Dr. Pertinnet's dates! Ransom smiled. Outside the room, the little doctor's voice was detailing dreary instructions to Nila's occasional bubble of assent.

Slowly he reached for the envelope, pried it open with thumb and forefinger and peered inside.

More dates. No, only one this time. Rather, what was left of the one used in the analysis.

A black powder residue of the brittle fruit streaked the lower edge of the envelope. Ransom dug his finger into it idly. Some powder wedged into the nail. He brought his hand up and sniffed the stuff.

Strange! He felt—dizzy. What a—*a warm* odor!

He steadied himself against the table and reached for a pinch of the powder. He brought it near his nostrils. He paused for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and inhaled deeply.

The lights went out and the floor dissolved.

He was falling, falling through endless space and eternal twilight. Fear swathed itself about him like an oversized blanket. He beat his arms frantically against the dark as he somersaulted slowly.

CHAPTER III

Round and round he went; round and round and down. Always down into the hungry gloom. He was startled to find that he was screaming; he closed his mouth with difficulty.

There he was sitting on the bottom. Bottom of what? And when had he hit? There hadn't even been a thud; at the rate he was falling—what was it: thirty-two feet per second?—he should have broken at least every other bone. He felt his body carefully; nary a bone.

But when had he hit?

He rose on the hard, grey surface and stared into the shifting darkness. Something—something was moving.

A camel with a long scaly tail that ended in a human head broke from the shadows and raced past him. Ransom whirled in time to see it disappear into the dark again, the smiling head bumping evenly against its shanks.

"Sqlgg," breathed Ransom Morrow.

As if in answer, he heard a musical whine on his right. He turned. A cat! Nothing else? No saber-teeth, no pink worms instead of hair? Nope, just an everyblesseday ordinary cat! A snow-white cat with the tiniest black saddle.

It lays on its belly, all four feet braced, regarding him intently. "Miauu?" it questioned.

Ransom knelt and snapped his fingers at it. "Here puss," he called. "Here puss, puss, puss."

Red gums rolled back to display a lion's maw in miniature. It lunged forward and snapped. Ransom jerked his hand away and leaped to his feet. "You are certainly one suspicious feline," he said examining his fingers ruefully. "Not that I bame you—here!"

He jumped as two sets of voices—one human—began screaming.

The camel had wandered into what appeared at first to be a bramble patch. Only, as Ransom squinted ahead desperately, he saw it wasn't brambles that curled round it with hairy strength and dragged it to a many-eyed darker blot of head in the center. It was a huge spider—or a collection of fantastically large spiders with only one head but with the slavering evil and obscene legs of them all.

Long neck distended, the camel was bellowing its terror deafeningly while, at the other end, the human head screamed almost recognizable words as it bit and tore at the extremities of the incredible arthropod.

Ransom backed away slowly, his hands slipping the leather belt off his waist. Not much of a weapon in this place, but he had to have something in his hands!

As the great dripping mouth in the center took its first bite of the camel, a bluish light began to break. Ransom looked around for the cat.

It was rubbing against the scrawny legs of an old man dressed in the flapping rags of a once-white laboratory smock.

The old man placed a hand foolishly against the side of his face. "Y-you aren't Hallock," he mumbled.

"No," Ransom told him. "But I'm not one of the citizens of this place either." He stepped toward him.

With a look of complete fear, the old man moved back a few steps. Then he turned and ran. The cat loped after him easily, its smooth stride contrasting with his determined staggering.

Ransom cursed and began to follow. The old man and the cat grew fainter though the light was much stronger now. After a moment, they had disappeared. The multi-legged spider had also vanished. He was alone in a well-lit emptiness.

"Now what?" he asked himself.

"Now what *what?*" Nila's voice questioned. He spun around. She was bending over Hallock's sleeping head on the hospital pillow. The severe room was back, white and reassuringly normal. Down the corridor, the noisy clock still ticked.

"Where have you been? You know my patients can't be left alone. We just stepped outside the door for a moment and you took it into your head to go sightseeing. Can't you forget that explorer's itch long enough to do an old man a simple human kindness? And while I'm on the subject, how did you get out of here? The doctor and I were standing right against the door all the time."

He braced himself against her words. The ivory chest still sat heavily on the small night table; the envelope hung precariously over one edge, a tiny trace of powder oozing out of it. Ransom adjusted the envelope and noticed that his belt was in his hands.

Slowly he threaded it back around his waist. "You say I wasn't in the room when you got back?" he asked at last. "Then where was I?"

"That's the point; the door's the only exit, the windows are all barred and I looked under the bed and behind the screen. Where *did* you go?"

He smiled bleakly. "Oh, somewhere east of the sun and west of the moon. Pretty goshawful place. Has the doctor left?"

"Yes. He looked in to make certain that Hallock was asleep, couldn't find you, and toddled off to his lab. Ran," she moved close to him, "you look upset. I've never seen such strain on your face. Maybe you better wait for me downstairs."

"Check." He stopped at the door. His right hand was scratched. "That cat," he asked, "the one Pertinnet fed some of Hallock's fruit. The one that disappeared. Was it mostly white with a tiny black saddle near the tail?"

"Yes," he was upset at the sudden whiteness of her face. "Did you see it?"

"Um-m-m. Sorta. Kinda." He went downstairs.

When she joined him a half-hour later, trim in her blue nurse's coat, he had transferred the bulk of a pack of cigarettes from his pocket case to several ashtrays, charring them only slightly in transit. She glanced deductively at his

face then linked her warm arm to his. "Come on, Ran. Let's get out of this place. I want to play."

So they played. At a good restaurant, in the balcony of the best musical comedy of the season, around the dance floor of a dimly lit night club. "Some playing," she commented while a white-coated band stuttered suave music. "When we came in, I almost told the head waiter, 'Pardon my corpse.'"

"I'm sorry. Just not up to snuff tonight, Nila. Would you like to go home?"

She turned to him at the door of her apartment hotel. "All right, Ran, so you saw the cat. Did you see Risbummer, too?"

He spread his feet apart and took a deep breath. "What—what did Risbummer look like?"

"About the same size and weight as Dr. Pertinnet. Old, a little helpless, as if he had reached enough of a second childhood to need a mother again. He had a small acid burn on the tip of his nose."

Ransom blinked his eyes and tried to remember. Did the old man have a small burn on his nose? Maybe. Maybe not.

"I don't know; I really couldn't say. Look here, you and the doctor, you really believe Hallock's story! You don't think he's insane!"

Nila looked down at her shoes, considered. "This is top-secret, Ran; but I'll tell you. We *have* to believe Hallock to a certain extent. His mind is definitely affected—that we know—but how much is traumatic, induced by his strange experiences and how much is the strange experience itself . . . ? Dr. Pertinnet has his scientific reputation to consider: he can't go off a quarter-cocked until he is absolutely certain of his facts. Meanwhile, we've been treating Hallock as a regular patient and keeping our suspicions from everybody, even you. We feel there may be some other explanation for Hallock vanishing so frequently—"

"Vanishing? You mean he disappears from the bed?"

She nodded. "And reappears on it again ten or fifteen minutes later right inside his straitjacket. The first time it happened, Jenny, the night nurse, threw a fit up and down the corridor. Dr. Pertinnet smoothed her down and told me to take over till morning. It happened twice while I was on duty. We've managed to keep it quiet; Jenny takes it in her stride now. You see, Hallock only disappears when he's had a sedative. At all other times, he lies fairly still and chatters about his dates."

"I know," Ransom brooded. "They aren't. Dates, I mean. I tasted a bit of one, or rather I smelled at it. That's what sent me to—wherever I went."

"You didn't! Why Ran, that's crazy, it's dangerous! We don't know exactly—but Dr. Risbummer is supposed to have eaten one and he—we only wanted you to get some information from Hallock, to—"

"Sort of a scientific stool pigeon," he snarled. "That gallant old codger is battling something infernally alien and ugly with every ounce of his used-up strength, and all you can do is shoot sedatives in him so he'll perform some more intriguing tricks. No. From here on out, I play Hallock's ball. If he wants guns and knives, he gets 'em; though I can't quite see—".

"But Ran! You'll ruin everything. At first we thought the Fruit had something—but since Dr. Pertinnet had it analyzed, we've been forced to drop that line. But if you show Hallock you believe him, we'll never find out what causes his disappearances, what brought on his neurosis. Don't you see what I mean?"

"No. I don't. First, you can get negative analyses a hundred times from Sunday, but it still is the Fruit which somehow activates the whole situation. If either you or Dr. Pertinnet had submitted it to the most elementary analysis of all, you'd have found it to be so, if only you'd have done what Risbummer did—tasted it! Now—well, now you've called me in and I'm going to do my gosh-damned best to help the old guy. I don't know how exactly, not yet, but I'm going to hit it realistically, honestly."

She laughed at him. "Realistically! The greatest romantic of them all talking about realism! Ransom Morrow who goes trotting off into the African equivalent of a haunted house because the ordinary, adult world doesn't give him enough thrills. Don Quixote tilted at windmills, but you—you make them up!"

"Now, look, Nila. There's no call—"

"Yes, there is," she told him fiercely. "You insist on slandering the only realism I'll accept, the realism of science which must be skeptical if it's to be of any use. Perhaps you've discovered something of value by your reckless experiment; perhaps we've overlooked an important item in limiting ourselves to a chemical investigation of the Fruit. Perhaps, I say. But you are still a layman whom we called in as a layman, and not as a research director. You're worse than the average at that because of your tendency to fly off the handle. In the future, you'll be barred from the hospital—and from Hallock. I'll convey your *experiences* to the doctor and let him make what he can of them." She paused with her hand on the door. "And perhaps I'll see what I can make of them."

Ransom grabbed her shoulders. "What do you mean? What will you do?"

She shook his arm away. "I don't know yet. But as nurse, it's my case. I'll do as I think best for the patient."

Then she stepped resolutely away from him and into the lobby. He watched her cross into an elevator and move to the rear without once looking up to his eyes.

CHAPTER IV

White glare from the street light made him conspicuous and awkward. He walked for half a block talking to himself, and finally called a cab.

This was the nastiest quarrel he'd had with Nila. Of course, it hadn't been the one incident; it was the whole pattern of his coming jaunt to the Uganda and her unquenchable opposition.

But Hallock! Poor, poor Hallock. Trapped by a misstep in the suddenly-become-reality of his own nightmares and held there by a series of stumbling,

peering psychiatrists. And what nightmares! None of the humdrum kind that brought you awake in a fog of fear and the desperate desire to flick on the light switch; but nightmares filled with incredibly nasty monstrosities whose abilities to inflict injury and even death were disturbingly possible.

And Risbummer? And the cat? What invitation had they answered to find themselves in this world of half-tone horror? And the others—all the others there must have been who nibbled at the Fruit . . .

Dawn chilled outside his bedroom window before Ransom Motrow finally, reluctantly fell asleep. He had no dreams, but he slept late. He would have slept later, had not the telephone awakened him.

"Morrow? This is Dr. Pertinnet. I'm at the hospital. Uh—did Miss Budd discuss our patient with you last night? Did she mention any specific plans relative to him?"

"Discuss patient?" Ransom yawned a thick gob of sleep out of his mouth. "What you talking about?"

"She can't be found anywhere. First time it's happened. She's a very conscientious nurse. The night nurse said she took over in the morning, while Hallock was still sleeping off his sedative. I came in an hour ago and found Hallock awake, Miss Budd gone. There's no sign of her at all, just a half-eaten date on the floor which Hallock says—"

It was as if there was a definite *click* in the back of his brain. His mind churned away the clouds, tore into full wakefulness. "Hallock! Does he say she's eaten the Fruit?"

"Ye-e-es." The doctor's voice had uncertain edges. "He says she was curious about it when he woke this morning, and he persuaded her to eat a date. He claims she's eaten so much that she's now a permanent part of his nightmares and only you can get her out. Of course it's all preposterous, but since I can't find her anywhere and since you and she—"

"Yeah! Well, hold on to your stethoscope: I'll be right over!" He slammed down the phone, and dressed with flying fingers.

All the tightly packed equipment for his expedition into the African wilderness was in the next room. Ransom thanked a dozen minor deities that he was the youngest member of the group and as such was burdened with most of the armament which covered every imaginable emergency. He telephoned for a taxi, selected three awkwardly shaped, oilskin wrapped bundles, and staggered downstairs with them.

The cabbie helped him tug them into the car. His eyes grew round when he felt the muzzle of a submachine gun and the pointed ends of cartridges through one set of wrappings. They grew rounder when Ransom slammed the door and yelled out the hospital address. "First time," he muttered as he settled behind the wheel, "first time I ever seen an accident go to the *right* place to happen."

Dr. Pertinnet met him in the corridor as he dragged the heavy bundles behind him. "Why, wh-what's that?"

"Pills and poultices," Ransom told him. "Tincture of nitro-glycerine. Nice strong medicine that's good for what ails Hallock. I think it may cure him. Here, doc, take this one. It's bulky and keeps getting in my way."

He pushed into the old explorer's room with the doctor laboring and protesting behind him. A plump nurse blocked his way to the bed.

"Shoo, girl. Go away. Scat. This is man's work. Take yourself a toddle." He pushed past her determined opposition. At a signal from the doctor she left the room, her nose high and her shoulders shrugging like a cement-mixer.

Ransom knelt and began to tear the wrappings off the weapons. He stared up at Hallock smiling from the bed. "I'm ready. Map it out."

"Good," came the whispered reply. "I'm sorry I had to talk Miss Budd into danger, my boy, but I'm getting desperate. I spend more and more time in my dreams now with greater risk of never returning. I counted on you to act immediately so that the nurse wouldn't spend too much time alone, but I swear I never intended for her to eat that much of the Fruit. I swear I intended for her to come back."

"It's done now. Doctor, give him a sedative. Don't look at me like that—*give him a sedative!*"

As the doctor unfastened the blanket and swabbed Hallock's arm, Morrow asked, "What do I have to do to get Nila back? And Dr. Risbummer?"

"I'll tell you; I'll be with you . . . there. We must kill the mother—the Brood Mother of Fancies and Horrors. You have the weapons?"

"Everything short of a portable hydrogen bomb. Rifle—high-powered Winchester—Tommygun, two machetes and a batch of hand grenades. Manage?"

The old explorer lay back and stared at the ceiling. "Wonderful! If only I'd had the sense years ago, myself . . . None of this would have happened. I'd never have reached this helpless, horror-ridden state." His whispers became almost inaudible as his mind wandered under the influence of the sedative.

"In Mesopotamia, far south of Dinra, where the desert turns to broken rock that looks like rubble left over from the making of the world . . . None of the native guides will go there although there is a legend that the Garden of Eden and that treasure unheard of . . . *Treasure!* There is nothing but the tree—you pick through the sharpest rocks . . . and there is the tree—"

"The tree?" It was the doctor breaking his staring silence.

"The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil," Hallock said softly without lowering his gaze. "Not the way it is in the Bible . . . although some ancestor of man must have eaten of its fruit . . . it grows in a deep rocky cleft where the sun cannot reach it and where no water flows . . . and yet it thrives . . . the summit is a magnificent crown of large feather-shaped leaves—purple, red and gold . . . and the Fruit . . . dozens of species of fruit, over a half of them unrecognizable, all on the same tree . . . not of this earth, that tree—yet who knows what creatures have eaten of it in the past, and what the Fruit eaten by a hairy Adam and his Eve. I could not know, God help me . . ."

His voice stopped. Dr. Pertinnet tip-toed over to see if he was asleep. Suddenly the whispers began again. The old explorer's eyes bulged, and he licked his dry lips.

"I could not know . . . and I didn't care . . . I picked the dates from the top because I recognized them and I thought I would be safe . . . I thought I would be safe! . . . How was I to know which fruit had already been eaten by man . . . and then it began! . . . I lived in my own dreams, the dreams of my past . . . but only for a moment . . . it was pleasant . . . then . . . but when I gave some to the camel driver and he disappeared into the dream . . . then when I saw the Brood Mother and what she sent forth in my mind . . . I could not know which fruit was already eaten by man . . . I could not know . . . what kind of men we would be . . . what kind if a different had been eaten then . . . if the one I picked had been eaten . . . a race living in its dreams . . . strange powers . . . what some races have eaten . . . a dinosaur nibbling at the top . . . monstrosities of all geologic time eating of it . . . how was I to know which . . . which fruit . . ."

He was asleep.

Morrow said "Whew!" He glanced at the doctor who was licking his lips and staring at the man on the bed.

"Coming with me?"

The doctor was startled. "Where? How?"

"Into Hallock's madness, or his mind. Comes to the same thing. Want to come along? I need a gun-bearer."

"Now look here, Morrow! I've stood around and let this foolishness go on—"

"It's not foolishness," Morrow interrupted. "You should know that by now. You can't find Nila and I can. You can't give an adequate reason for Hallock's disappearances and I can. You don't dare taste any of that fruit which your lab says is chemically pure, while I—"

"Oh, all right. All right. I'll admit this situation has its unusual side . . ."

"The understatement of the millennium. Now wrap this grenade belt around your waist and pick up those cartridge boxes. See if you can slip a machete under your right arm—tha-a-at's right. I'll carry the guns and the other machete." Morrow pulled two dates out of the ivory chest on the night table.

He grinned at the doctor who was bent almost double under the weight of the armament. "How do you know," the old man grumbled, "that, assuming we go anywhere, we will arrive with this—this confounded arsenal?"

"Don't know. I just assume it from Hallock's instructions and the fact that I carried all my clothes with me on my last visit. Here, have a date. Go on take it!"

The psychiatrist took the fruit, turned it around doubtfully and finally, following Ransom Morrow's example, popped it in his mouth.

"Mmmm, good," he said. "Tastes just like—"

CHAPTER V

They were falling. Down and down, around and around. All about them the curiously shifting darkness. Morrow felt the pressing fear, the screaming desire to run away and panic.

"—just like a fruit-cake the hospital dietician makes when she's in a good mood," the doctor was saying. His voice was quite calm, with the slightest edge of wonder to it. "Interesting that this should begin by a falling sensation. I think that the most reasonable explanation may be—"

They had landed. Again there was no memory of the actual moment of contact. The doctor rose and brushed non-existent dust from his white hospital gown. He looked around near-sightedly and continued.

"The most reasonable explanation may be found in Freud. Not the Freud of declining mental powers, but the earlier, more acute scientist."

Ransom Morrow shook his head and began to divest the doctor of his weapons. "Doc," he said. "You are one nerveless wonder."

"Eh? Quite. Now on the subject of a falling sensation, Freud would have it that—*Risbummer!*"

He had turned and noticed the old man in tattered gown who stood watching him fearfully. "Risbummer! So this is where you've been keeping yourself! Where are your notes, man?"

"My—notes?"

"Yes, your notes on the Hallock case. Come, come, we need them badly. Inexcusable to go away without leaving your notes available to the staff. I've been through the hospital files three times and your office twice. Where did you put them?"

The other passed his hand through his sparse hair. "My notes. Did—did you look in my cigar box? I seem somehow—I—I think I left them in the cigar box. I'm—I'm sorry for the trouble you've had."

"That's quite all right," Pertinnet told him magnanimously. "Just so we get them into the files eventually." The two men moved off to one side, conversing in low tones, for all the world like two physicians at a sickbed. *Risbummer* *did* have a nose-burn.

"Old home week in Hallock's subconscious," Ransom said to himself. He finished loading the rifle and stood up. "Nila," he called. "Hey, Nila!"

He was surprised at the speed with which his call was answered. A hysterical figure in white dashed out of the darkness and flung herself against his chest. He held her, soothed her, kissed her. "You aren't hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"No, I'm not hurt. But this place—this awful, *awful* place!" She stopped sobbing and straightened her hair. "I must look terrible. As bad as *Risbummer*. He ran away when he first saw me, but the cat was friendly and after a while so was he. He was in a broken state when I arrived: it's wonderful what a little human conversation will do."

"Well, you aren't merely human," Morrow assured her. He glanced over

her head and stiffened. That pith helmet, those tropical shorts, that flowing black hair—it was Wells W. Hallock, but the Hallock of fifteen, of twenty years ago. The cat rubbed affectionately against his khaki wool socks.

"Some tableau!" Hallock said in the booming voice of youth. "Pertinnet and Risbummer are holding a consultation; Budd and Morrow are holding each other. All the stuff come through?" He walked forward briskly.

While the two doctors came up to watch, he selected a machete and loaded the sub-machine gun; he hung two grenades from his belt.

"Don't mind if I take the Tommy?" he asked. "I know the vulnerable spots better than you. Let the docs carry the ammo."

He moved off into the lifting gloom and Morrow hurried up beside him. "Where are we going? I don't want to take Nila where there's any danger."

"Well, the location keeps changing but we'll get there soon. And don't worry about Nila: she's safest with you. You two along with Pertinnet and Risbummer are stuck here, by the way: you've all eaten too much of the Fruit. Your only hope is to wipe out the Brood Mother. From what I've seen, all this stuff will dissolve with her. I don't know whether we have enough equipment to sock it to her, but if we haven't—". He shrugged.

Nila walked directly behind them, looking about fearfully at the uglinesses slipping by in the darkness. The doctors brought up the rear, struggling under the heavy boxes of ammunition. The cat roamed on the outskirts of their little group, never moving off too far.

"How is it that you keep your youth?" Morrow asked.

"I don't know. It's one of the things I don't understand about this whole affair: I'm always as young as when I first tasted the Fruit. But that's just one puzzler. Another is why everyone who eats the Fruit winds up in my dream rather than in their own. Possibly because I was the first to eat it and when it was fresh from the plucking at that. It's convenient to stay young, though, and I've often thought that if it weren't for these horrors barging about—Hello!"

A tiny red head supported on a flexible stalk of a neck waved down out of the grey shadow. There were three eyes in the head and a kind of sucking proboscis for a mouth. The other end of the stalk protruded from a bulging red mass some ten yards away.

As the head descended lazily, Ransom pumped a shot into the center eye. He heard Hallock let go with a burst from the machine gun, and the head, severed from the neck, fell and dissolved into red liquid as it fell. Almost immediately a new head began to take form on the thin, twisting neck.

"Get the body—there!" Hallock was yelling.

Ransom pulled a grenade from his belt, ripped the pin out with his teeth and lobbed it at the main body of the creature. He had another out before it exploded and hurled it after the first for good measure. Then—"Drop!" he yelled.

They all fell flat as the terrific concussion sent bits of steel and red, writhing flesh over their heads. When they rose, the monstrosity was gone.

"You fool!" Hallock was raging. "You wild-eyed, trigger-happy fool! Wasting good grenades on a creature like that when we could have finished it with cartridges. We'll need all of our grenades for the Brood Mother." He took stock morosely. "Only five left. They'll have to do."

"Wasn't that the Brood Mother?" Morrow asked. He was still unsteady, but he put a reassuring arm around Nila.

"That? The Brood Mother? Why that was just one of her minor offspring—part of a nightmare I had ten years ago in Tunis. When you see the Brood Mother—you'll recognize her!"

"How?"

"She just couldn't be anything else! Let's go."

Nila walked up and slipped her arm on Ransom's shoulder. "If we meet one of mama's bigger boys, I want to be as close to you as I can get, Ran," she whispered.

"Steady," Ransom warned. "I'm about ready to go off the deep end myself. But we've got to hold steady." He followed Hallock.

Behind him, he heard the doctors wheezing under the weight of the cartridges. "Did you notice the peculiar manifestation of the color red, in that monster Risbummer?" Dr. Pertinnet was saying. "Remember what Piscoodberry says about the occurrence of red in dreams of the mentally unstable?"

"Do you mean Piscoodberry *On Simulated Hypnotism* or the Piscoodberry monograph on *The Primary Colors and the Subconscious*?"

"The monograph, of course! Where are your thoughts, Risbummer? What else could I mean but the monograph? Now, according to Piscoodberry . . ."

Their voices became low and professionally confidential. Ransom and Nila grinned at each other. They felt better as they moved along behind Hallock.

The number of distorted creatures around them seemed to increase, but nothing moved out to disturb them. They were watched by hundreds of crazy eyes in all kinds of fantastic faces.

An odor, perceptible for the last few minutes became suddenly stronger. It was something which could only be described as a stink, "Although," said Ransom, "it smells like the great grand-daddy of all stinks. Like everything filthy and foul concentrated in one place." The light had grown until there was almost perfect visibility.

The cat had been moving stiffly in front of their group. It stopped, stared ahead and began to hump its back. A violent, hating hiss shot from its teeth. Then it slowly retreated until it backed into Hallock's legs. It crawled behind him.

Hallock stopped and peered ahead. "This is it," he said in a low, frightened voice. "The Brood Mother. Load up and get ready."

CHAPTER VI

The two men saw to their weapons, made certain their grenades were easily detachable and would not catch on any part of their clothing. They stuck the machetes through their belts. Nila helped with the clips of cartridges.

"You stay here," Ransom whispered. He turned to the doctors who were standing near him in wistful helplessness. He gave Pertinnet one of his grenades. "Take care of her." Then as Hallock squared his shoulders and sighed, he moved up beside him.

"*Gotterdammerung*," Hallock said. "The last big battle."

They walked forward gingerly, in step, a foot moving slowly ahead after the other one had found firm purchase. The cat padded at their side, its belly hugging the ground.

The stench tore at their nostrils. Solid waves of odor came at them in stronger and stronger layers. Ransom scratched at the stock of his Winchester trying desperately to see what lay ahead.

Then they saw it.

An immense carpet of living flesh, cradled in its own slime, lay before them. Miles long—and miles wide. A great expanse of flat undulating tissue, green and yellow and sickly orange. Every now and then, some monstrosity would float up to the side of the organic carpet and move away from it. It was breeding before their unbelieving eyes.

Back and forth it souged in the thick goo, and the odor arising from it was indescribable. And then, Ransom saw it was not entirely flat: at regular intervals, there were gaping mouths set flush with the surface, opening and closing spasmodically.

Hallock rushed forward and Ransom, licking lips that tasted like dehydrated cardboard, moved with him. He knew they should go slowly, stalk it and not fire until they knew just where to strike. But he was hypnotised by the horror of the thing, by Hallock, and he ran at it like a madman.

Hallock stopped at the edge of the slime, and tore the grenades off his belt. He pulled the pins and threw them in long looping arcs far into the monster. There were explosions and bits of awful flesh splattered about them.

Then Hallock was on his knees, screaming curses and laughter and spraying bullets into the expanse of living matter.

There was an answering scream from ten thousand throats. A vast ripple ran across the blanket of flesh, from mouth to mouth. Then—the far side lifted. Higher and higher—the monster was rearing from the slime!

Ransom got off a grenade as he saw it come up. One mouth winked out into a dripping hole. Then he was beside Hallock firing into it as it rose.

Those mouths—they weren't only mouths, they were part of individual faces with discernible eyes and nose—they were gaping red mouths and horrible faces, but they reminded Ransom of something he couldn't quite remember.

"Get that center bulge," Hallock was gasping. "Looks like a vital spot!"

Ransom squeezed off a shot right into the palpitating scarlet blob at the exact middle of the creature. It ricocheted! Armor!

He pulled the pin out of his last grenade. Slime dripped down on them. He threw the grenade. It exploded far above the red spot.

They cursed in unison and began to stumble backward, firing as they went. The monster undulated forward, the gaping mouths at the top swung down closer.

Ransom remembered the grenade he had given Pertinnet. He turned and ran back to where he had left Nila and the two doctors. He dropped his Winchester as he ran not bothering to retrieve it.

Nila stared over his head at the awful thing coming down and forward. "Ran, oh Ran," she moaned.

Pertinnet was examining the grenade, turning it over and over in his hands. "Strange device," he observed. "No discernible trigger mechanism. Simplicity should be one of the chief factors—"

Ransom plucked the grenade from his hands and whirled. Hallock was firing straight up now, burst after burst of bullets that had as little effect as wads of paper. He ran out of ammunition or the gun jammed, and he dropped it. He swept the machete from his belt.

"Back, Hallock," Ransom called. "Get back!" The older explorer didn't seem to hear him, but moved ankle-deep into the slime.

Ransom pulled the pin, took dead aim at the red spot and threw. The entire red bulge seemed to open outward as the grenade hit it. The monster screamed again, a perfect chord of screams. It folded back, and in upon itself.

As it rolled back, Hallock stepped on to the surface swinging his machete like a lunatic. He sliced great hunks out of it before the edge behind him curled inward, carrying him with it—shrieking in horrible pain—wrapped in huge agonizing mouths.

The world cracked. Millions of unmatched cymbals clashed against each other in a discordant rattle of sound. Great splinters of greyness came smashing down all around them.

Ransom grabbed at Nila as he felt himself fall. They turned and twisted down through a dissolving murk. On both sides he could see fragments of bloated green bodies floating off into spiraling vapor, red and violet areas writhing off into nothingness. Pertinnet and Risummer, also clutching each other, were floating down slowly some distance away.

Nila huddled her warm and frightened body closer to his. "Those faces," she whimpered. "Those faces! Do you know whose they were? Hallock! Awful! How unbelievably awful!"

They *were* Hallock, Ransom remembered now. Ten thousand infernally grotesque caricatures—all the faces of the Brood Mother—were Wells W. Hallock's own face. And in that last moment as he stepped in to the creature, Hallock must have known it!

They came to rest in the midst of dazzling whiteness. They shut their eyes
(Please turn to page 84)

"We of the Outflowed Phenomeno Committee risk our lives to safeguard the thing."



THE THING by RICHARD MATHESON

It was against the Policy to see The Thing, but then so was eating roast beef, and drinking coffee, and smoking cigars. . . .

"I DON'T like it," Mrs. Lee said firmly, clinking down the cup into its saucer base. "I don't like taking Billy to see it."

"I want him to see it," said her husband. "He's old enough."

The four of them sat around the front room table. Indirect illumination made the chipped glasses sparkle, pointed up the threadbare cloth and napkins, the dull glint of old silver. The elliptical plate in the center of the cloth was almost bare except for minute shreds of roast beef and a few gravy stains.

Mr. Tomson picked up his last scrap of bread and rubbed it over the gravy spots. With a languid sigh, he poked the moistened bit into his mouth and, with eyes closed, swallowed it.

"Ah, me," he groaned. "One almost forgets. The sense of taste fades. The buds atrophy."

He opened his eyes and looked around the table.

"It was magnificent," he said pleasantly. "An ancient delight."

Mr. Lee finished his coffee and put down the cup with a gesture of amused bravado.

"Well, that's it," he said. "From now on—pills, venous banquets and gourmets' nightmares of concentrated vitaminic juices. Science has shown us the light."

Mrs. Lee folded her frayed napkin nervously.

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that," she said. "You know it isn't right."

"He's only joking," Mrs. Tomson said. "Harry is the same way."

She glanced with superior amusement at her husband.

"Men are fond of uttering blasphemies in the sight of their adoring mates."

Harry Tomson snickered to himself.

"Women," he said, "are the ideal scientists. The female world is as properly constricted as that of the Policy Board."

Kathryn Lee got up with a jerky restive movement.

"Well," she said, hurriedly. "Let's clear it up before someone comes and sees it."

"Yes," agreed Myra Tomson, "it would be fine if we were sent to the Policy Camp just for eating old beef."

"My dear wife," said Harry to no one in particular. Then he stood, held up his glass. Quivering at the bottom were a few drops of thick red wine.

"My friends," he toasted, "this is a solemn occasion. Your hidden frost lockers—and ours—are now completely empty. The last vestige of authentic food is gone. We must now return to the dismal and sordid prospect of never more eating honest nutriment. Science says pills. We, sheeplike, eat pills. No disease sayeth the test tube warriors, no bacilli, no microscopic bug-eyed monsters. Thusly, down with the meat loaf!"

He gestured with the glass.

"I drink," he said, "to the privileges of indigestion, to the dead—yet no less glorious—right of man to acquire by his private means, a most personal bellyache."

Ralph Lee chuckled.

"To this I'll drink," he said. "Ladies. Your glasses."

Myra clucked parentally and smiled at Mrs. Lee. Kathryn licked her lips unconsciously.

"Humor them along, darling," Myra said. "After all; it *is* the last time."

Drawn in, Kathryn picked up her glass and sipped down its remaining contents. Over the delicate gold rim her eyes met those of her husband. He smiled, the corner of an eye twitched facetiously. She put down her glass.

"I still don't see," she said, "why we have to go and see that thing tonight. Nor why you insist on taking Billy."

She shook her head and began picking up plates.

"You know our boys," Myra said possessively. "They hate to grow up."

"Say, why don't we drop home and pick up Lilly," said her husband. "I'd like her to see it too."

"Not on your life," Myra said strongly, getting up from the table. "I don't want her dragged out of bed."

"Can't see why Billy has to go," muttered Kathryn, "just to see some stupid . . ."

"Kate!"

She looked quickly at her husband with surprised belligerence.

"You don't have to shout," she said quietly, embarrassed at this outburst before the Tomsons.

"There's very little I get angry about," Ralph said, tossing his napkin on the table. "You know that."

He spoke to all of them.

"We mustn't ever call the thing stupid. It's all in our pitiful society that isn't stupid."

"Amen," said Harry.

Myra shrugged.

"You two sound like college boys again," she said. "Rah rah rah! Break the pattern or the pattern breaks us! Break the . . ."

"Let's clear the table," broke in her husband. "Let's get it away fast, we enemies of the state."

"We'll do it," Kathryn said. "You men can go in the library and talk."

"As you've been dying to do all through the meal," Myra observed, "but keep it down to a shout."

"Come on," Ralph said, with a smile. "We're not wanted. Besides I have a surprise for you."

"Yeah?"

Harry's eyes lit up.

"Good," he said, "there's precious little left in this society that surprises me anymore."

"There they go again," Myra said, starting for the apparatus room with a handful of dishes and silver.

Kathryn touched her husband's arm.

"Do we have to take Billy?" she asked. "You know it's against the Policy to see it."

Ralph patted her shoulder reassuringly.

"Don't worry," he said. "You know that Harry and I used to see it regularly. We never got arrested did we?"

She shook her head slowly.

"I still don't like it," she said.

"Get the dishes put away as soon as you can, dear," Ralph said. "We don't want to keep Billy up too late."

With a sigh, she went into the apparatus room. Through the revolving panel came Myra's muffled voice.

"I don't know where we're going to wash these," she was saying. "They just don't plan on dishes any more."

"Well, let's go in the library," Ralph said. The two men stepped across the smooth tile floor and up a short railed incline.

"What are you going to do with the tableware?" Harry asked. "Keep it?"

"What did you and Myra do?"

"Oh," said Harry, "Myra put it somewhere. Some secret woman's place. Souvenir of the dead past. That sort of thing."

"I suppose Kate will do the same."

They entered the small library. Built into the walls, the dustless bookshelves were filled to overflow with plastibooks.

Hands on hips Harry looked over the titles.

"*Categorical Astronomy*," he read, "*Principles of Absolute Physics*, *The Unchanging Universe*, *The Contiguous Pattern*."

He hissed a breath through clenched teeth.

"Ah, me," he said, "after a while you begin to wonder if it's all true, if these books really have all the facts."

"I'd agree," said Ralph, "if it wasn't for the thing."

"Yes. The thing." Harry fondled the words, "the wonderful thing. Spotlight in abysmal murk."

He shook off the minor irritation.

"Well," he inquired cheerily, "what's the surprise?"

With a look of repressed wickedness flickering on his face, Ralph pulled out a book from the top shelf. He held it up so Harry could read the title: *Within This Barrier*. Turning the book on its side, Ralph delicately lifted the cover.

"Cigars!"

Harry was exultant, his mouth falling open.

"Lord man. Are they real?"

"Sniff," Ralph said grandiloquently. "Take a big one."

Harry bent over and inhaled deeply the heavy tobaccoed fumes. His nose wrinkled torturously.

"Oh," he moaned. "I'm dead and am now in transport. Where did you get them?"

"Historic remainders," said Ralph. "Take one."

Eagerly, Harry picked a cigar out and rolled it tentatively between his thick fingers. He ran it under his nostrils. Then, with a pleased sigh, he inserted one end between his teeth and bit off the tip.

"Magnificent!"

"And now let us pray that this primordial match still knows its business," Ralph said.

He struck it on his heel and it flared into yellow light. Musky clouds surrounded Harry's head like a tenuous wraith.

He blew out a long lingering stream of smoke.

"I am a boy again," he said, with a relish.

They were sitting in the shapeless form-assuming chairs placed near the wall television screen.

"This has been a wonderful evening," Harry said. "A dream. A fantastic wish come true."

He drew in one of the few remaining puffs of the dwindled cigar.

"Isn't it pathetic that you should have to say such a thing," Ralph said, dropping ashes into the book box. "Isn't it a brutal comment on the times that the simplest and most ordinary of pleasures can assume such vast incredible proportions?"

"It *is*, it *is*," agreed Harry wearily, looking wistfully at the stump of cigar. "Well, it's our own fault. We've outdone ourselves. Built ourselves such a rock-ribbed and Simon-Pure system that it's become a cage."

"Here. Take another one," said Ralph, extending the box. "No. No. Go ahead. There are only two more. Why drag out the torture? Let's get them smoked away and forget that such a delicious vice ever existed."

"I wonder," said Harry, lighting the second cigar, "if we've tended toward that philosophy in all respects. Timid acceptance. It's a pit we fall deeper into every day. You know, it might be that some day even the thing will be forgotten, even that minute spark of conscience be extinguished. What do you think?"

"Possible," said Ralph somberly. "Doubtlessly, horribly possible. We've forgotten much. How to struggle, how to rise to dizzy heights and sink to unparalleled depths. We no longer aspire to anything. Even the finer shades of despair are lost to us. We've ceased to be runners. We plod; from structure to conveyance to employment and back again. We live within the boundaries that science has determined for us. The measuring stick is short and sweet. The full gamut of life is a brief shadowy continuum that runs from grey to more grey. The rainbow is bleached. We hardly know how to doubt anymore."

Harry Tomson stirred in the chair and stared up at the array of books.

"Yup," he said. "You've called it. Life beneath a logarithmic arrogance. Every written word pregnant with dogmatism, proclaiming the end of surprise. There's nothing strange, nothing beyond the pattern anymore. Our Order is The True Order."

He sighed and looked at his friend. Ralph smiled back.

"Well," he said, "there still *is* the thing. While it exists . . . we can hope."

"Ralph?"

It was Kathryn. He stood up and turned toward the archway.

"Yes, dear?"

"For the last time," she entreated, "must we take him?"

He nodded.

"Yes, Kathryn. I want him to see it. I refuse to let him go through life without knowing about it."

"But suppose he talks about it to others? He's just a boy."

"He won't be the only one who's seen it. Stop worrying."

She pressed her hands together and stared at him.

"You'd better get him," he said.

She turned around slowly and he heard her heels click down the ramp.

Ralph looked at Harry.

"You think it's right that Billy sees it don't you?" he asked.

"Lord, yes," Harry exclaimed. "I only wish I'd thought to bring Lilly along tonight. I'd like her to see it too."

Then he yawned and tensed his muscles, eased them and let lassitude sluice its way through his limbs.

"A few more puffs," he reflected, "and we'll be on our way."

Billy sat in a sluggish heap on Kathryn's lap. His sleep-ridden eyes peered out the ground car window.

"Where are we going mama?" he asked for the fifth time.

"For a ride," said Kathryn. She glanced accusingly at her husband. "He'll be so sleepy, he won't even know what he's looking at."

"He'll know," Ralph said. "My father took me to see it when I was a boy. I was half asleep too. But I remembered. I always remembered."

He kept his gaze on the wide highway which spanned the pedestrian walks like taut ribbon. Towering above them soared the cloud-piercing commercial towers.

The car hummed past one of the great light reflecting signs that dominated the highway edge at every hundred yards.

"*Science is Truth*," glinted the sign.

Behind it ran a perspective line of other boards.

"*If Science Says No—No!*"

"*All is Patterned.*"

"*Our Order is The True Order.*"

"It's as you say Harry," Ralph said over his shoulder. "After a while you take the words for granted. Habit takes over. It's a terrible thing. But if you say anything long enough, repeat it to excess; after a while you believe what isn't so. Everything is reversed."

"Yup," said Harry. "Too true."

"Must you two always rant?" Myra said. "It's like being married to politicians."

Harry chuckled.

"What would I do without you, precious," he said, patting her hand, "You are the dispassion that moves the globe."

"Foocy," she said.

"Look Billy!" Ralph said suddenly, making his wife start. "Up there!"

"What, papa?"

"See the falling star," Ralph said, "over there."

Gently, he turned Billy's head with his right hand.

"Oh!" said Billy. "I see it. What is it papa?"

"A falling star darling," Kathryn said. "Papa just told you."

"Who dropped it papa?"

They all laughed in quiet amusement.

"Nobody dropped it sweetheart," Kathryn explained. "It's a piece of rock that came too close to our earth and got on fire. All the scientists are watching it now."

"Why mama?"

"Why. They expected it and they want to see what happens. You see they knew it was going to fall a long time ago. Even before you were born they knew it would fall."

Ralph's mouth tightened.

"Don't tell him such a thing," he said angrily. "You know it isn't true."

She caught a deep breath.

"I'm telling him the truth," she said tensely. "The Policy scientists don't make mistakes. The universe *is* ordered. Are you going to tell your son that it isn't?"

"I want my son to see for himself," Ralph said.

"We should have brought Lilly," Harry said.

"That would have made everything just perfect," said Myra.

"Ah, me," said Harry in an amused tone.

"And don't you start your clever dissertations on that thing again," Myra snapped.

"Simple fact, my dear," said her husband. "It breaks the pattern. Ergo: no pattern."

"Nonsense."

"Irrefutable logic, I must confess," said Harry with a chuckle.

The ground car turned and sped down a side ramp onto a narrow deserted street on the outskirts of the city.

"And suppose the Policy Guard breaks into . . . to this *place* we're going," Kathryn said.

"They won't," Ralph said.

He glanced over at Billy. The small blonde head had slumped onto Kathryn's shoulder. He was looking out the front window through half shut eyes. Ralph smiled.

"This is something you'll never forget, Billy," he said.

"Yes, papa."

Kathryn kissed her son's forehead and smoothed his hair with gentle fingers.

"I positively feel like an arch-criminal," Myra said, as they stood in the dark alley waiting for someone to answer the door.

Kathryn was glancing around nervously. She held Billy tightly against her.

"Please Ralph," she begged, "let's go home. We'll come another night."

"No," Ralph said stubbornly. "We're here now. No point in going back."

A tiny slit opened in the door. Kathryn gasped as a thin beam of light shone in her face. Then the light was cut off, two suspicious eyes peered out at them.

"Yes?" a deep voice inquired.

"We, uh," Ralph faltered, "we want to see the thing. I want my son to see it."

The eyes flickered to Billy who clung to his mother. Then, the cold gaze moved over their shoulders and down the long deserted length of alley.

"Pass in your identification card," said the voice.

Ralph took out his bill fold and drew from it a small plastic card. He held it up to the niche and fingers plucked it in. They waited.

"This is silly," Myra fidgeted. "What are we; children playing a game?"

"Hush, hush dear," Harry said, "or I'll make a speech."

Myra glared at him.

After a moment, there was a sound of bolts being withdrawn, and the door groaned open.

"Come in quickly," said the man.

He was tall, middle-aged, dressed in grey. He relocked the door as soon as they were in.

Their footsteps echoed on worn steps as they followed him down. The air was cold and damp.

"If he becomes ill," Kathryn said threateningly, drawing Billy's jacket collar up.

"There is no illness in the pattern," Ralph said in mild bitterness. Then he glanced at her guiltily. "We won't be here too long," he said.

They entered a large room with stone walls. It was arranged like an auditorium, irregularly spaced chairs all facing the slightly raised platform in front. Separated widely, a few old men, one young couple sat quietly in the dimness, waiting. On the platform was the outline of a broad semi-spherical case completely hidden by a large black robe.

Their shoes clicked on the floor as they went down to the third row and moved in. Myra cleared her throat and the sound fluttered through the room like a swarm of bats. She looked around hastily, an embarrassed flush spotting her cheeks.

Harry grinned and patted her head. She threw him a look of flustered irritation.

They finally settled down on the flimsy chairs.

"Let me hold him," whispered Ralph, taking Billy from his wife.

Thin-lipped, she released her son and clasped trembling hands on her lap. A shiver ran down her back.

They sat in silence for five minutes.

Myra stirred.

"When are they going to show it for pity's sake?" she mumbled to her husband peevishly.

He shrugged.

"Have no idea," he said. "Getting nervous?"

"Yes," she said under her breath. "I'm scared to death."

Harry smiled.

"I don't like it," Kathryn said to Myra. "It isn't right to be here."

Myra pressed her hand.

"It's just a game, Katie," she said. "Don't let it upset you."

The man in grey went up to the platform and stood beside the robed case. He coughed; looked at the back wall.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he started, in a solemn muted voice. "Perhaps some of you came here tonight to be amused. It may be. However, I must believe and hope that most of you came for the very same reason we of the Outlawed Phenomena Committee risk our lives to safeguard the thing.

"You may believe me, ladies and gentlemen, when I tell you that *this* phenomenon, one of the few remaining, is of immeasurable import to all of us."

"Why?—you ask."

He paused dramatically, reaching out his lean hand toward the robe.

"Answer that for yourself," he finished.

He drew back the robe.

There was a concerted creak of aged wood as everyone leaned forward involuntarily. Breaths were held. Eyes peered anxiously in the gloomy stillness.

Under the half-globe plastic cover was a small glittering machine.

Its gears were turning slowly and soundlessly. Jeweled centers sparkled under the single spotlight that hung from the ceiling.

"This is the thing," the man said, softly, "the machine that never stops."

Ralph leaned over his son's head and whispered.

"See, Billy?"

"Yes, papa," the thin voice was obedient.

"You know what it means?"

"Uh. No, papa."

Kathryn took Billy's left hand in hers.

Ralph said:

"It means that the things they'll tell you in school won't *all* be true."

"Ralph!" hissed his wife.

He shook her off. She twisted her shoulders in frightened impatience. Billy looked at her, then back at his father.

"I don't expect you to understand it all," Ralph went on, "but just remember this, Billy. Science, The Policy Board, says that the machine up there can't possibly work. You understand that?"

"Yes, papa."

"But it *is* working, Billy. See it work! It's been turning around and around for more than five thousand *years*. Before you were born, before I was born, or my father or *his* father.

"And it will keep on turning around after you're grown up and you bring your own little boy here to see it. And when you do, you must tell him, like I'm telling you, that the machine will always run. Even if all the Policy Boards in the world say it won't."

(Please turn to page 86)

GOLDEN GIRL BY JACK VANCE

Young and fantastically beautiful, she was, an excitingly lovely creature from somewhere out in space, with skin of purest gold. And she belonged to Bill Baxter—an intimate, intricate, mysterious jewel that he had found in the night . . .

THE *Des Moines Post* scooped the world on the greatest story of history, and Bill Baxter became a hero.

An hour after the edition hit the streets, every road leading to Kelly's Hill was choked by caravans of the curious—the amateur public and the professionals: reporters, photographers, and correspondents to the news-services, domestic and foreign.

The FBI and Army Intelligence had arrived first. Road-blocks turned back a thousand cars, cordons through the fields intercepted walkers, fighter planes chased off the airplanes which wafted toward Kelly's Hill like moths to a light.

The survivor of the crash lay through the night at Dr. Blackney's small hospital where Bill Baxter had taken her. She awakened early in the morning, lay staring at Dr. Blackney, clenching the sheets with golden fingers.



A pair of federal agents stood by the door to her room; two hundred others guarded the hospital and turned back the crowds of those who came to stare and marvel and murmur among themselves.

An Army doctor and a spare aseptic individual reputedly connected with the Secret Service checked Blackney's diagnosis of a cracked collarbone and attendant shock, approved his treatment. The woman submitted with an air of helpless distaste.

The secrecy stimulated rather than deterred the

They hoped for a glimpse of the out-world woman . . .

press. Imagination was encouraged to run wild. The crash was a wind from exotic islands, an intimation of tremendous new fields of truth. The rest of the world dwindled to a locality; the lustiest news seemed stale and trivial. Thousands of columns were filled with speculation, tons of newsprint lavished on rumor, acres of photographs, charts, star-maps, imaginative drawings were published. Someone had even located a picture of Bill Baxter—the reporter who thinking to investigate a spectacular meteor had found a wrecked space-ship and pulled out the limp young woman with the golden skin. To add the final gloss to this magnificent bubble of sensation—the final compelling overtones—it was rumored that the golden woman was beautiful. Young and fantastically beautiful.

From the first, Bill Baxter refused to be separated from the woman. Every minute possible he spent in the armchair across the room, covertly studying her face. The golden woman was something intimate and intricate, a wonderful jewel he had found in the night. She fascinated him; she aroused his fiercest protective instincts, as if by lifting her from the burning hull he had taken her for his own property.

His assumption of sponsorship met grudging acceptance, as if even the government recognized some primitive law of treasure trove—or at least admitted that Baxter had as much right to act as her agent as anyone else. Dr. Blackney took his presence as natural and desirable; the federal agents watched him with quiet sarcastic remarks to each other, but made no attempts to limit his contact with the woman.

She ate little, mostly broth and fruit-juice, occasionally a piece of toast, rejecting eggs, milk, meat with faint repugnance. For the most part, during the first two days, she lay limp and passive, as if stunned by the catastrophe which had beset her.

The third day she raised to her elbow, stared around the room, looked through the window a minute or two, then slowly lay back. She gave no heed to Baxter and Dr. Blackney, who were watching her from across the room.

Blackney, a grizzled country doctor with no pretensions to omniscience, clicked his tongue thoughtfully. "It's not right for her to be so limp . . . she's perfectly healthy, perfectly sound. Her temperature's a degree up, but that might be normal to her race. After all we know little about her."

"Normal." Baxter seized on the word. "Is she a—*normal* human woman, Doctor?"

Blackney smiled faintly. "The X-rays show a—humanoid skeleton, and apparently human organs. Her features, conformation—well, you can see for yourself. The only distinguishing feature is her metallic skin."

"She seems only half-conscious," muttered Baxter. "She takes no interest in anything . . ."

"Shock," said Blackney. "Her brain is letting itself go slow . . . That's why she's not being moved."

"Moved?" cried Baxter. "Why moved? Where? By whose orders?"

"Orders from Washington," said Blackney. "But there's no hurry. She's weak, confused. She should have time to pick up the threads. She's just as well off here as anywhere else."

Baxter agreed emphatically. In Washington, among so many official people, he might be shouldered aside. He rubbed his chin, compressed his lips. "Doctor, what would you estimate her age to be?"

"Oh—if she's aged according to our rates, perhaps nineteen or twenty."

"If so, she's a minor in the eyes of the law . . . Do you think I could get appointed her legal guardian?"

Blackney shook his head. "Not a chance in a thousand years, Bill. Don't forget this girl is not an ordinary waif, who needs a guardian."

"Somebody's got to look after her," said Baxter stubbornly.

Blackney smiled faintly. "I imagine she'll be made a ward of the government."

Baxter frowned, clenched his hands in his pocket. "That remains to be seen."

On the afternoon of the fourth day, Baxter was astonished to see her throw off the coverlets and leave the bed with no evidence of weakness. She went to the window, where she looked several minutes out across Blackney's garden.

Baxter fidgeted behind her like a nervous hen, worried lest she weaken herself, yet reluctant to thwart her in any way. At last she turned, and in the long white nightgown she seemed absurdly young and inoffensive. For the first time she appeared to notice Baxter—surveyed him from shoes to hair with a scrutiny most casual and cool.

Baxter employed the technique recommended by a thousand precedents. He took a step forward, touched his chest, and said, "Bill."

She raised her eyebrows as if surprised that he commanded an intelligible thought, and repeated "Bill" in a soft voice.

Baxter nodded eagerly, pointed to her. "You?"

She touched herself and spoke a word full of slurred consonants and throaty vowels. The closest Baxter could make was a sound like *Lurr'lu*, or *Lurulu*.

Earnestly he began to teach her the language, and though unenthusiastic, she grasped ideas instantly and never forgot a word once it passed her lips.

Her story, as Baxter gathered it bit by bit, was simple enough. Her home was a world "very far past the stream of blue stars"—so she expressed it, and she called it *Gbb'lekthwa*. Baxter, unable to master the beginning guttural, pronounced it merely *Lekthwa*, which appeared to amuse the girl.

The space-ship was a pleasure-craft, she told him, on the order of an Earthly yacht; they had chanced on Earth with no particular end in view. A careless repair had weakened one of the control motors, which—failing at a critical time—had plunged the ship to destruction against Kelly's Hill.

On the seventh day Blackney pronounced the girl in good health, and Baxter sent a nurse out for clothes. When he returned to the room—although she exhibited no trace of personal modesty—he found her examining herself in a mirror, with an expression of satisfaction.

"Were any of my personal garments found in the wreck? These—" she

pulled at the cashmere skirt "—they are picturesque, but they chafe, they feel strange against my skin."

Baxter, who thought her magnificent, stammered a reply. "Everything was destroyed in the heat. . . But if you'd tell me what you want, I could have something made for you. Of course, you'd be rather conspicuous . . ."

She shrugged. "I will wear these."

Baxter asked a question which had long been burning inside him. "Do you—expect to return to your home? Can you communicate with your people? Do you know how to build a space-ship?"

She stared off across the garden. "No, just the barest principles . . . *Lekthwa* is many stars distant. I would hardly know how to go."

Baxter looked at her sharply. Her voice had been cool, very soft, like a dark pool in the forest. With an anxious tightness in his throat, and watching her sidelong, he reached for one of the books he had brought. Joining her at the window, he showed her a map.

"This is where we are," and he indicated. She bent her head, and Baxter studied her profile. This was the closest he had been to her since the night he had carried her from the wreck, and a strange fluttering pulse awoke in his neck.

She glanced up, and Baxter stared deep into the amber eyes. He saw the pupils change, and she moved slightly away. She turned her eyes back to the map. "Tell me more about your world."

Baxter gave her a thumbnail history of civilization, indicating the Nile, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley. He showed her Greece, described Hellenic thought and its effect upon European culture, sketched the Industrial Revolution, and brought her to date.

"So today there are still sections of the world independent and hostile to each other?"

"That is unfortunately true," Baxter admitted.

"Several hundred thousand years ago," mused Lurulu, "we had a period called 'The Era of Insanity'; this was when the white-haired people of the south and the golden-haired people of the north purposely killed each other." She paused, then said vaguely, "They had a culture roughly equivalent to yours."

Baxter examined her. "Your hair is a very light golden."

"The white-haired and the golden-haired peoples are well-mingled now. In the barbarous ages, there was great prejudice against the golden-haired people, who were somehow considered less admirable. It seems so peculiar and cruel now."

She put down the book, went to the window. "I would like to be in the sunlight. Yours' is a sun much like ours." An airplane passed across the sky. "And there is air-flight on Earth?" she asked in mild surprise.

Baxter assured her that air travel was commonplace, and had been so for the last twenty years. She nodded abstractedly.

"I see. Well—let us go for a walk then."

"As you wish," said Baxter.

The federal agents in the hall followed slightly to the rear.

Lurulu motioned to the guards. "What is their function, and what is yours? Am I a prisoner?"

Baxter hurriedly assured her that she was as free as the air. "They are merely to guard you from annoyance by eccentrics. As for me—I am your friend." And he added stiffly, "I will not intrude upon you, should you so desire."

Lurulu did not answer, but walked out on the sidewalk, looked up and down the street. The police had thrown a barrier across the ends of the block, and at either end stood a small crowd, hoping for a glimpse of the out-world woman. The guards ran out ahead, waved them off.

Lurulu ignored the onlookers, completely indifferent to the staring eyes and excited babble. Baxter, uncomfortable and somehow resentful, followed at her elbow as she turned up the street. She seemed to enjoy the sunlight, and held her hand outstretched, as if feeling the texture of the light. Her skin glowed like rich satin. She breathed deeply, glanced in at the houses which lined the street. Blackney's little hospital was in a pleasant suburb, shaded with great elms, and the houses sat well back among gardens.

Suddenly she turned to Baxter. "Your people all live on the ground, then?"

"Well—we have apartment houses," replied Baxter. "They go hundreds of feet up into the air . . . How do you live on *Lekthwa*?"

"We have pleasant places floating in the sky—sometimes out in the clear sunny air, sometimes among the clouds. There is no sound but the wind. We enjoy the aloneness and the splendid vistas."

Baxter stared, half in disbelief. "No one lives on the ground? Are there no houses?"

"Oh—"she made a vague gesture—"occasionally by some beautiful lake or forest there is a cottage or a camp. The face of *Lekthwa* is, for the most part wild—except for the Industrial Segment and the photo-synthetic basins."

"And who works in the industries?"

"Young people mostly—children. The work is part of their education. Sometimes they improve the machinery or develop new biogotypes—is that a word? No?—No matter. After a period of machine tending, those who wish become designers or engineers or advanced technicians."

"And those who prefer not?"

"Oh—some are idle, some become explorers, some artists, musicians, some do a little of everything."

For a few seconds Baxter marched in glum silence. "Sounds stagnant to me . . . Sounds as if you'd be bored."

Lurulu laughed aloud, but made no answer or argument, which, perversely, annoyed Baxter even further.

"And are there any criminals?" he asked presently.

She glanced at him, still smiling slightly. "On *Lekthwa* everyone likes living, likes his own personality. Only rarely do offenses exist, and these are treated by brain-arrangement."

Baxter grunted.

"Crime occurs when the society is unpopular," she added off-handedly, "when the culture provides no out-alleys for human drive."

Baxter asked with a slight edge of sarcasm in his voice: "How can you discuss social problems so authoritatively when you don't have any on *Lektwa*?"

She shrugged. "We know of several worlds where social problems exist. We have installed missions on these worlds, and are gradually bringing about reform."

Baxter asked in perplexity, "Do men—human beings—live on these other worlds too? I consider it very strange that even our two worlds have produced identical species . . ."

She smiled wryly at the word. "I suppose our physical structure is more or less the same. But we are hardly 'identical'."

She stopped to examine a bed of flowering red geraniums. Baxter wondered what her reaction would be if he put his arm around her waist. His arm twitched—but the guards sauntered close behind and eyes stared from all sides.

They reached the corner and halted. Lurulu looked into the corner grocery store, observed the meat market. She turned to Baxter wide-eyed. "Are those carcasses?"

"Well—yes," admitted Baxter.

"You eat dead animals?"

It began to irritate Baxter constantly to be on the defensive. "They're not poison," he growled, "and they're a healthful source of proteins."

"You haven't fed me any of that—that animal flesh?"

"So far, very little. You seem to prefer fruits or greens."

Lurulu turned, walked quickly past the store.

"After all," said Baxter, "it's only carbon, oxygen, hydrogen . . . You show a rather peculiar obsession, rather narrow-minded prejudice."

Her voice had become cool and vague once more. "There are psychological reasons for not putting death in our mouths . . ."

THE next morning a black car of unmistakably official nature pulled up in front of the hospital; a man in an Army uniform and two others in civilian clothing, alighted.

The FBI guards stiffened slightly. There was a muttered interchange and the three swung up the steps. In the front office they were met by Dr. Blackney.

"I am Major-General Devering," said he who wore the uniform. "From the OSS. This is Dr. Rheim, of the Institute of Advanced Research, and this is Professor Anderson of Ledyard University."

Dr. Blackney shook hands with all three—Major-General Devering, a thick-set man with a pink lumpy nose and shining, slightly protruding eyes; Dr. Rheim, long, thin, solemn; Professor Anderson, short, fat, equally solemn.

"I suppose," suggested Dr. Blackney, "that you've come in connection with my guest?"

"That's right," said Devering. "I suppose she's well enough to be questioned? My men tell me she took a walk yesterday and appeared to be conversing with Mr. Baxter."

Blackney squinted thoughtfully, pursed his lips. "Yes, she's sound enough physically. Perfectly well, as far as I can see."

"Perhaps then," suggested Dr. Rheim, "it would be possible to move her to a place more readily accessible to us?" He raised his eyebrows questioningly.

Blackney frowningly rubbed his chin. "Accessible for what purpose?"

"Why—for study, various types of examination . . ."

"She's physically able to go anywhere," said Blackney. "But so far her legal position has not been established. I really see no need to move her—unless she herself wants to go."

Major-General Devering narrowed his eyes. "Aside from that aspect, Doctor, this young woman may have information of great value to the country. Don't you think it's important that we check into it? In any event, you have no authority in the matter."

Blackney drew his chin back, twice opened his mouth to speak, twice snapped it shut. Then he said: "I have authority over who enters this office. However, you may speak to the young woman."

Devering stepped forward. "Please show us to her room."

"Down this hall, please."

Bill Baxter sat beside Lurulu at a card table, teaching her to read. He looked up, in surprise and annoyance.

Blackney introduced the visitors. "These men," he said to Lurulu, "wish to ask you about your life on *Lekthwa*. Do you object?"

She glanced at the three with little interest. "No."

Major-General Devering moved forward a trifle. "We have a rather extensive program, and would like you to accompany us to new quarters—which will be more convenient for every one concerned."

Baxter jumped up. "No such thing!" he shouted. "God, you've got your nerve! One thing that's not going to happen is an 'extensive program', third degree, whatever you want to call it!"

Devering eyed him stonily. "I'd like to remind you, Mr. Baxter, that you have no official standing in regard to the young lady; and that she is the ward of the government, and subject to security laws."

"Have you got a warrant?" inquired Baxter. "If not, you're in a worse position officially than I am. As far as questioning goes, I appreciate that there's much that you want to know, and I'd like to help you—but you can do your questioning here, an hour or so a day. You can fit your questioning to the young lady's convenience, rather than she to yours."

Devering's mouth opened slightly, showing white teeth, and his chin protruded. "We'll damn well do what we see fit, with no interference from a whippersnapper of a reporter."

Dr. Blackney interposed. "May I suggest, gentlemen, that you leave the

decision to the lady? After all, she is the one person most directly involved."

Lurulu had been watching with a slightly wrinkled forehead. "I do not care to go with these men. But I will answer their questions."

A nurse entered, whispered into Blackney's ear. Blackney raised his eyebrows, quickly arose. "Excuse me, it's the President calling."

"Let me talk to him," said Baxter wildly. "I'll tell him a thing or two."

Blackney ignored him, left the room. A sullen silence fell, Devering and Baxter glowering at each other, the scientists eyeing the Lekthwan woman, and she, oblivious, watching a humming-bird outside the window.

Blackney returned, breathing rather hard. "The President," he told Lurulu, "has invited you to spend a week at the White House."

Lurulu looked involuntarily at Bill Baxter. Grudgingly he said, "I suppose it would be the best thing for her, in the circumstances. When does the visit start?"

Blackney reflected. "I suppose right away. I didn't think to ask."

Baxter turned. "We might as well leave at once."

Devering wheeled toward the door, departed without a word, and the two scientists, after bows to the Lekthwan woman, followed.

WASHINGTON reacted to the Lekthwan woman with unprecedented fervor.

In the first place, she was no celebrity of the usual sort. She had built no empires, destroyed none, had been elected to no office, performed no antics on stage or screen, was not associated with any vice or depravity. She was a visitor from another star. Further it was reported that she possessed a wonderful beauty. The total effect was dramatic.

Lurulu seemed indifferent to the tumult. She went to several parties, attended to opera, and received numerous gifts from publicity-hungry manufacturers—four new automobiles, clothes of every description, perfumes, baskets of fruit. One contractor offered to build her a house to any specifications she cared to submit.

She was taken on a lavish sight-seeing tour to New York. Mrs. Bliss, hostess of the expedition, inquired if such monumental edifices existed on her own planet. No, replied Lurulu, she doubted if on all *Lekthwa* there was a structure even three stories in height, or a bridge longer than a few feet of tree trunk spanning a brook.

"We have no need for these great masses," she told Mrs. Bliss. "People are never assembled in groups large enough to need large buildings, and as for rivers and seas, they are merely part of the planet's surface above which we spend much of our lives."

Baxter was her constant companion, an association which she now encouraged. Baxter was aware of her likes and dislikes, and protected her from most of the hostesses and agents. And as she came to find him useful, so did he come to feel necessary to her, and nothing in his life had meaning other than Lurulu.

A lewd rumor reached his ear, and in a troubled spirit he confided it to Lurulu. She looked up in surprise. "Really?" Then she took no further interest in the subject. Baxter departed in anger.

He arranged two hours daily interview with scientists—biologists, physicists, linguists, historians, anthropologists, astronomers, engineers, military tacticians, chemists, bacteriologists, psychologists and others. These found her general knowledge vast and exciting, but vague in detail—helpful mainly in that she was able to indicate boundaries of regions yet to be explored.

After one of these sessions, Baxter found her in the apartment he had rented for her, alone on a settee. The time was about twilight and she sat looking across the park, into the luminous blue-gray sky.

He sat down beside her. "Are you tired?"

"Yes—very tired. Of curious people . . . Ponderous questions . . . Talk . . . Nonsense . . ."

He said nothing, sat staring out into the twilight. She sensed the quality of his silence.

"Excuse me, Bill. I never mind talking to you."

His mood instantly changed; he felt closer, more intimate with her than at any time of their association.

"You've never mentioned your personal life," he began diffidently. "Were you . . . married?"

She answered quietly. "No."

Baxter waited.

"I was an artist—of a sort unknown to you here on Earth." She spoke softly, her eyes still out on the darkening sky. "We conceive in the brain—color, motion, sound, space, sensation, mood, all moving, shifting, evolving. When the conceiver is prepared, he imagines the whole sequence of his creation, as vividly as possible—and this is picked up by a psychic-recorder and preserved.

"To enjoy or experience the creation, a person inserts a record into an apparatus, and this plants the same images into his mind. Thus he sees the motion, the color pattern, the flows and fluxes of space, the fantasies in the artist's mind, together with the sights, the sounds, and most important, the varying moods of the piece . . . It is a difficult medium to master, for it requires tremendous concentration. I am merely a novice, but certain of my imageries have won praise."

"That's very interesting," said Baxter heavily. Then after an interval: "Lurulu."

"Yes?"

"Do you have any plans for the future?"

She sighed. "No. Nothing. My life is blank." She stared up into the sky where now the stars were showing. "Up there is my home and everything I love."

Baxter leaned forward. "Lurulu—will you marry me?"

She turned, looked at him. "Marry you? No, Bill."

"I love you very much," he said, looking out into the sky. "You've become everything in the world to me. I worship you—anything you do—or say—or touch . . . I don't know whether you care ten cents for me—I suspect not—but you need me, and I'd do anything in the world to make you happy."

She smiled faintly, abstractedly. "On *Lekthwa* we mate when we find someone in rapport with us psychically. To you we may seem cold-blooded."

"Perhaps you and I are psychically right," suggested Bill Baxter.

She shuddered almost imperceptibly. "No, Bill. It's—unthinkable."

He arose. "Good-night." At the door he paused, looked back to where she sat in the dark, still staring up at the night sky, the far white stars.

Returning to his own apartment, he found Dr. Blackney awaiting him, sitting comfortably in an armchair with a newspaper.

Bill greeted him with subdued warmth. Blackney watched intently while Bill mixed a couple stiff highballs.

"I thought I'd see how my ex-patient was adjusting herself to life on Earth."

Bill said nothing.

"What's your opinion?" Blackney asked.

Bill shrugged. "She's getting along all right. Pretty tired of so many people . . . I just now asked her to marry me."

Blackney leaned back with his highball. "And she said no—".

"That's about it."

Blackney put down his glass, picked up a book beside him on the couch. "I just happened to chance on this, rummaging through some old stuff . . . It's rather a long chapter. I won't read it. But the gist of it—" he opened the book to a page covered with fine print, looked quickly up at Bill. "The title, incidentally, is *Strange Tales of the Seven Seas*. Published in 1839, and this chapter is called 'Shipwrecked off Guinea, a Personal Diary'.

"It's about a wreck—in 1835, when a British ship went down in a gale off Equatorial Africa. In the confusion Miss Nancy Marron, a girl of gentle upbringing, aged twenty, found herself alone in one of the ship's boats. The boat weathered the storm, presently drifted near a small island, then uncharted, but now known as Matemba. The continent of Africa lay about thirty miles past the horizon, but this naturally was unknown to Nancy Marron.

"In any event, she was able to drag herself ashore and up on the beach, where a native found her and took her to his village." He turned the page. "She was received with great reverence. The natives had never seen a white man or woman, and thought her a divinity.

"They built her a grand new thatched hut; they brought her food much of which, so she noted in her diary, she found inedible—slugs, entrails, and the like. In addition, they were cannibals, eating the bodies of any of their tribe who died."

Blackney looked up. "Her diary tells all this rather objectively. She was a good reporter and, in the main, keeps her homesickness out of the text.

"She learned the native tongue; found that she was the first white person ever seen on Matemba, and that vessels never approached the island. This discovery ended her last trace of hope. The last entry reads: 'I can stand it no longer here among these savages friendly as they may be. I am sick at heart, I long for England, the faces of my family, the sound of my own blessed tongue, the smells and sounds of the pleasant old countryside. I know I shall never see or hear them again in this world. I cannot bear this hideous loneliness any longer. I have a knife, and it will be very easy for me to use it. May God understand and forgive.' "

Blackney looked up. "There the diary ends."

Baxter sat like a statue.

"Odd, isn't it?" said Blackney.

"Very," said Baxter.

After a moment he jumped to his feet. "Just a minute, Blackney . . ."

He ran up the stairs, two at a time, turned down the hall, stopped by a white door. He rang the bell, waited . . . waited.

He threw himself against the panel; the lock splintered out and Baxter staggered into the dark room.

He switched on the lights, stood staring at the figure on the floor, the golden figure with the chest welling red blood . . .

HALLOCK'S MADNESS *(Continued from page 64)*

against the glare, opened them cautiously again. The glare subsided. Objects appeared indistinctly, became clearer, resolved into the sharp outlines of reality.

Then—no more obscene shapings, no more distorted vision. They were back in the hospital room, all of them, Ransom and Nila still shuddering with excitement. Dr. Pertinnet was unbuttoning the restraining blanket. He placed it carefully around the gory, broken mess on the bed.

"I'll get some sedatives for all of us," he said at last. Risbummer followed him through the door.

"Dr. Pertinnet and his sedatives!" Nila cried hysterically.

Ransom crossed to the table and lifted the small ivory chest. "This may not be in the best interests of scientific investigation, Nila, but I think we should destroy what's left of this stuff."

She grabbed the chest from him. "We certainly should," she agreed. "I'll dump it into the hospital incinerator. I'm through with dates for the rest of my life. But—of course—I'll settle for rice."

"A deal." He grinned at her. "If anyone should ask, a character by the name of Ransom Morrow has now had enough adventure to last clear through his grand-children!"

She walked unsteadily through the door. A moment later Ransom heard the incinerator door open. He lit a cigarette and smiled at the cat. It was lucky not to have a human memory.

Then he stopped smiling. Because the cat had something round and black in its teeth. *And it wasn't a mouse.*

MARVEL SCIENCE - FICTION QUIZ

by The Editors

There's more to science-fiction these days than the word-picture of a scantily-clad gal, complete with fishbowl helmet, in the clutches of some nefarious blem. These questions are designed to see if you can hold your own in the world of the future with our sf authors.

If you score two-hundred, brother, you ought to be writing sf for a living! A score of one-fifty or better indicates that you understand science-fiction with the best of them, and one-hundred or better still shows that you know your way around. If you dip below the century-mark, you have some boning up to do . . .

PART I

Let's start with a quintet of true-false questions this time, with ten points for each correct answer.

1. Neanderthal man was the direct ancestor of modern man.
2. Man has never seen more than one half of the moon's surface.
3. The sun is a comparatively small star.
4. The human mind has come such a long way in the twentieth century that the average man can now use about four-fifths of his brain.
5. Temperatures can drop so low during Winter on certain parts of the Earth that it gets too cold to snow.

PART II

Scoring ten points for each correct answer in the following group, you're really ready to soar into the furthest reaches of space with our future astrologers if you can tally fifty points here.

6. Name the three distinct parts of a comet.
7. If you were a visitor from out beyond the rim of the Milky Way, looking for our galaxy, what would be its most distinguishing feature?
8. How long has the rising sun actually been over the horizon before we see it?
9. Are the many so-called dark nebulae scattered across the Milky Way actually "windows" (or empty spaces) through which we can see out beyond the edges of our galaxy?
10. What is the outstanding peculiarity of the planet Pluto?

PART III

If you've been a follower of sf long enough, these multiple choice questions shouldn't pose any problems. Score ten for each one you can answer correctly.

11. Absolute zero is: a) the true zero of mathematics, which negates the need for minus numbers; b) the point at which, theoretically, all molecular motion ceases— -273 degrees C. or -459.6 degrees Fahrenheit; c) a temperature for which there is no numerical designation, since it is so low.
12. Sun spots are: a) severe eruptions on the surface of the sun which affect the climate on earth; b) an optical illusion caused by the strong glare of the sun when viewed with the unaided eye; c) a particular phenomenon of the sun associated only with total solar eclipses.

13. Jupiter's four bright moons are: a) all much smaller than Luna, but bright because they reflect the light from Jupiter's huge surface; b) very large satellites, two of which compare favorably in size with the planet Mercury; c) of as yet undetermined diameters.
14. The current theory on the nature of light holds that it is: a) wave-like in structure; b) composed entirely of particles of subatomic size called photons; c) a combination of both a) and b).

PART IV

Match a term in the second column with one in the first, not using any term from column two more than once. You get ten points for each correct pairing.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 15. Sperm Whale | a. An ancient flying reptile. |
| 16. Plato | b. The killer-whale of marine tradition. |
| 17. Sir Thomas Moore | c. Unexplained emanation from space. |
| 18. Pterodactyl | d. Ancient Greek playwright. |
| 19. Aurora Borealis | e. Electrical phenomenon of Earth's atmosphere. |
| 20. Cosmic Rays | f. Medieval writer of a super-scientific Utopia. |
| | g. A mammal far larger than any dinosaur. |
| | h. Gives one of the earliest accounts of the lost continent of Atlantis. |
| | i. Rays of light originating in the region of the Milky Way. |

**ANSWERS TO
QUIZ ON PAGE
89**

THE THING

(Continued from page 73)

"And it will keep on tuning around after you're grown up and you bring your own little boy here to see it. And when you do, you must tell him, like I'm telling you, that the machine will always run. Even if all the Policy Boards in the world say it won't."

Billy stared at the revolving gears, his lips parted. He blinked, kept looking intently, drinking in the sight of it.

Kathryn watched him silently, her face taut with fear for him. Unconsciously she stroked his hand. She closed her eyes and a tear ran down her cheek.

Billy turned to speak and Ralph leaned over to hear. Harry bent over his wife's lap to listen.

"What?" Ralph asked.

"Will it ever stop, papa?" Billy asked again.

Harry's lips raised in a prophetic smile. Straightening up he took Myra's hand in a tight protective grip.

Ralph patted his son's arm and spoke very quietly, looking at his wife.

"No, Billy," he said. "We'll never let it stop."

Science-fictioners get together! Science-fiction conventions are held every year by fan groups. The 1950 gathering was held in Portland, Oregon but this year the fans meet the pro's in New Orleans, La. during the labor-day weekend.

AMAZING SCIENCE ADVENTURES

THROUGH THE CURTAIN
OF TOMORROW, WITH
THE SCIENCE OF TODAY!

MARVEL'S SPECIAL FEATURE

THE PROBLEM OF ATOMIC WASTE — H. R. JAMISON

WHETHER we like to admit it or not, we're living in an atomic age. At Hiroshima and Nagasaki we've already seen the horrors of this age—and we can only hope that we don't see more of them in the future. As for the atomic wonders which lie just ahead of us in a near tomorrow—our view of this must still be seen in the pages of science-fiction. But there is one other important aspect of an atomic world which receives little or no publicity, and it can best be phrased in a question: what is done with *atomic waste*?

You produce atomic power, either for peace or for war—and in each case the by-product is deadly atomic waste, radioactive slag which, in many ways, can be more deadly than the bomb itself. Without a Geiger counter you can't tell what harmless looking material is infested with lethal radioactivity. The bomb can never sneak up on you: you know when it's coming. But the waste products of atomic power hide in what looks like harmless material. You can be contaminated before you know you're in danger.

Our atomic scientists are well aware of this, and they've been carrying on a behind-the-scenes war against atomic waste—with quite a bit of success. The problem, basically, is this: what can be done with the waste-products of atomic production to make them harmless?

The work thus far has fallen into two categories. First, they literally bury the radioactive material in concrete. This seems fool-proof, but even this imposes another problem. What can be done with the concrete which, unlike a thick screen of lead, is not fully protective against radioactivity? And the answer there is a simple one: the radioactive concrete is deposited in the ocean where those rays which do escape their cement prison will be so dispersed by the water as to be rendered harmless. Even deep-sea fish are not in danger!

The second method is even more ingenious. Here man uses his old bosom friend and arch-enemy, bacteria. Certain types of, otherwise useless, bacteria can absorb radioactive waste in the same way that your body tissues can absorb proteins. The result is nullified radioactivity, and once again man is safe. Enigmatic bacteria, which sometimes kills man and sometimes gives him food to eat now plays another role in the complex symbiotic relations of our world!

SIMPLE SIMON: NEWEST MECHANICAL BRAIN — MILTON WILLIAMS

THE young science of cybernetics (the study and building of thinking machines) takes a new step forward almost every day. The latest shows that cybernetics is really taking roots as a science, because one of the earmarks of a science is simplicity, and until recently the "cybernetic brains" have been very complex machines, cluttering up whole rooms or even wings of great buildings. But the latest, Columbia University's Simple Simon, is a compact, simple machine, as its name would indicate. Simple Simon is not a mechanical genius, like some of its bigger brothers, but Simple Simon can still do a lot of things a lot faster than man, and he's a big step towards the robotic society of the future.

Simple Simon can perform two very complex operations which are strictly the operations of mechanisms (be they flesh or metal) which can think. First, Simon can transfer information automatically from any one of its registers to any other. And second, Simon can perform reasoning operations of indefinite length. In other words, he has volition: he can receive data, sift it, and determine how to correlate it! And that, any way you look at it, is thinking, the same as the human brain can do. Only thousands of times faster.

Right now the greatest difficulty in the science of cybernetics is the human element: that is, Simple Simon and his bigger brothers are infallible themselves; they can correct their own errors, and they do it every time. But they must be fed information by human technicians, and these technicians can err. Wrong information means that Simon will invariably come up with a wrong answer. Another way of putting that is this: Simon's answer will always be correct within the framework of the data supplied him. His answer, then, will always be perfectly valid. But validity and truth are often two different things, and Simon's valid answer can only be taken to be a true one if the human element is first checked and double-checked for errors. Simon, in certain ways, is smarter than his creators!

Simon represents a world of tomorrow in which cybernetic brains are the engineers. Even then, however, the abstract theorizing which will lead to new developments must be done by man. But Simon and his fellows will relieve mankind of the drudgery of applying his science. Man will be able to explore, to theorize, to ponder, to develop—Simon and company will do the rest!

STIMULATION FOR THE BRAIN — WILLIAM L. TAYLOR

IT has been known for quite some time that, in the process of thinking, the brain emits electromagnetic vibrations which have been called Kappa waves. They are always associated with thought, and their rhythms vary according to the personality of the individual, and vary even further in the various psychological disorders. Most significant of all, however, is this fact: the Kappas are most active when you're trying to recall some bit of information out of your

memory, and they come with a great burst of energy when the recall is achieved successfully.

Now, all sciences take great steps forward by one simple procedure: they learn how to put the cart before the horse. For example, we've known about atomic explosion for a long, long time. But those explosions always were so puny as to be valueless, either for war or for peace. The next step, after we hypothesized what a really potent atomic explosion would be like, was to create one for ourselves. We did this, and now we have atomic power. In other words, we put the cart before the horse and came up with a great scientific discovery.

The same thing, scientists feel, can some day be applied to the Kappa waves. Consider. The human brain is a great storehouse of information: the amount of data which has impinged upon any man's consciousness is staggering. The trouble, however, is this: most of it is lost deep down within the mind, and very often you have the greatest difficulty even in remembering a fact which is big, important, and recent. Is there some way this huge reservoir of stored data can be tapped? Scientists are inclined to think that there is—but it is still far in the future.

Simply put, it's another application of placing the cart before the horse. We know that Kappa waves are most active when we're trying to remember something—coming forth in a burst when we finally do remember. Very well, then: it's quite probable that an artificial "bath" of Kappa radiation will help us to remember. It would stimulate the mind in such a way that any sensory data registered deep within the tissues of the brain can be brought to the surface.

It would be much the superior of a total-recall memory, because you still would be able to sift and consider, to highlight and minimize. Such an application of Kappa waves could well make a brilliant mind out of a dull laggard—and make a genius out of the average man!

(Answers to SF QUIZ on page 85)

I. 1. False. Like the anthropoid apes, Neanderthal man probably shares with man a common ancestor.

2. True. Strictly speaking, we can see a little more than fifty-percent of the moon, since Luna rotates on its axis once during the time it revolves about the Earth.

3. True. The red-giant Antares, for example, has a diameter approaching the size of the planet Mars' orbit around the sun.

4. False. Man can only use about twenty percent of his brain. The function of the remaining four-fifths remains a mystery.

5. False. Temperatures can drop so low that snow will no longer fall as flakes, but it can still snow.

II. 6. The head or nucleus, the coma (which surrounds the head), and the tail.

7. Its size. Our galaxy is more than twice the size of almost all the others.

8. More than eight minutes—since that's how long it would take light to reach us from the sun, which is about 93 million miles away.

9. No. They are great regions of gas and obscuring dust clouds.

10. Its smallness. Pluto is probably smaller than Mars, yet all the other outer planets are very large.

III. 11.b; 12.a; 13.b; 14.c.

IV. 15.g; 16.h; 17.f; 18.a; 19.e; 20.c.

POLYOID

by BRYCE WALTON

He'd passed the test, was why Sam Forbes was practically out of his mind with happiness. What test, you ask? You mean you actually don't know? Why, the test of course!

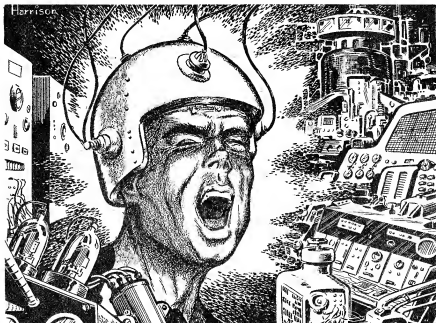
HE burst into the apartment, yelling happily, waving his hands, his metalfroth tunic whirring busily about through the glittering gadgets and tiny, streamlined machines like a spray of quicksilver.

His wife, Flora, ran in. "I'm so happy!" Sam Forbes yelled. "Flora, I'm so happy I feel like I'm going to go right out of my mind with happiness!"

He grabbed her hands. Together they spun round the apartment, round and round each other. Music played. The television screen flickered in three-dim technicolor.

Breathless, she finally managed to drag him to one side, onto a foam-rubber

He screamed, and the thousand relays worked, and he was part of them . . .



couch by the window overlooking the glittering honeycomb of the City. "What is it, Sam?"

"Can't you guess? Can't you? I've passed the test!"

"What test?"

"What test? *The* test of course! Gad, Flora, you know what test I'm talking about!"

She turned, sank back and closed her eyes. He noticed then that her face had suddenly gotten very white, so white he could see the tiny blue veins under her skin like ink marks.

"Yes, Sam. I remember now." She began to sob softly.

She had pulled a plug and his happiness drained out with a gurgling sound. He was both resentful and hurt by her sudden and unbelievable reaction. He put his arm around her. Her skin was so cold, he thought, cold and damp to the touch.

"Flora! What's the matter?"

"I—I'd forgotten you'd put in your application to take the test, Sam. Oh, Sam, I didn't think you'd ever pass it. I didn't know you—you had that kind of brain."

"What? What do you mean by that, Flora? If you think just because I've been an office clerk since we graduated from the Government School last year—if you think just because of that, I don't have any intelligence! Well—I passed the test didn't I?"

She kept her head back and her eyes closed and her shoulders trembled. "Sam, Sam—we don't know what it means!"

"I know what it means. You don't, that's the trouble. The greatest honor any worker can receive, and you cry about it. Any other woman would be proud. Yes they would be, and you know it. You're selfish that's all. If you were thinking of the Plan and the City instead of yourself—"

"Oh, Sam, please don't—"

He immediately felt sorry for talking that way. He pulled her head over against his shoulder. "Please, don't cry any more, Flora. I had no idea you would feel this way. I thought you'd be as happy as I am, just as proud."

"I guess I'm crazy, Sam . . . but I can't help feeling this way. I—I don't want to lose you. And I'll never see you again now. Doesn't that mean anything to you? Why, it's so crazy—all at once, after all the plans we've had and everything—suddenly you tell me it's over. What am I supposed to do? How can I be happy when you come in and tell me you're leaving and I'll never see you again? How?"

"But it's for the Plan!"

She sat up. She raised her hands up and made vague gestures in the air and her neck was rigid. She started to laugh, a high shrill sound. "The Plan! The Plan! The Plan! That's all anyone ever hears! I'm sick of the Plan. I'm tired of hearing about it, and I don't care who knows it. I don't care what they do to me for thinking this way!"

"Flora!"

"I don't care. I hate the Plan for what it's doing to us."

She got up and started to walk away, then sank back down again. She turned away from him and leaned her head on her arm. "I've been living a lie all the time," she said. "In a fool's paradise. Can anyone live outside the Plan? Maybe now the Plan's bigger than anybody and no matter where you are—or what you think you think—there's the Plan."

"Flora, I had no idea you felt this way."

She whispered. "I had a crazy idea that we were going to be happy together, and I had some little plans of my own—crazy little plans. Now I can see it was all a silly dream."

"What little plans of your own?"

"You know there are some who have never been in the City, or been a part of the Plan. People living way out in the country, or the mountains, places like that. Believe it or not, Sam, I've thought maybe someday we could sneak out of the City, and live in the country."

"Flora!" He felt suddenly cold. His eyes jumped to the door and back with apprehension. That kind of talk, ideas like that, could get people into a lot of trouble. And it certainly could queer his assignment as a Blue Light Worker in the Great Computer.

A few people had never become a part of the Plan after the big blowup, but those people were only a pitiful few, grubbing about in the earth, hunting like primitive savages. They were crazy people!

She whispered. "Anyway, Sam, what can the Plan do for us? Where is it taking all of us?"

He started to touch her shoulder, then drew his fingers back and stood up. He felt tired all at once. A helpless feeling crowded in all around him.

"Flora—how could you hate the Plan? How can you feel this way? The Plan is doing the greatest possible good for the greatest number, and that's happiness isn't it?"

"Is it? What is it going to give people . . . what that will take the place of us just being together? What will be bigger than that?"

"But that's a selfish, individualistic viewpoint, Flora! Can't you see that?"

She sat up again. Her eyes were red, but they were dry now. Hard lines ran down to the corners of her mouth, and she looked like someone else, he thought.

He lifted his head. "There is no greater service or honor than to be accepted for duty with the Blue Light! I'm proud to have been accepted for the most important job in the Plan!"

"Sure, Sam. I know. The public hero. Onward with the Plan—to what? All I know is, I'm scared. I've been scared all the time."

"How can you be scared when you have complete security?"

"All right, Sam. You win, or the Plan wins, something does. What kind of a test was it, Sam. Tell me."

"Mental exams, mostly calculus, logic, reaction speeds. My mind of course," he said proudly.

"Sure," she said. "The mind's a great thing."

"My mind must be better than any other worker's in the City, Flora! Think of that."

"I am thinking about it, Sam. Thought's a great thing. I can see a time when there won't be anything else but thought, thought, thought everywhere, just pure thought going out in every direction!"

She laughed, a short raw laugh. "Where's the Plan going, Sam? Tell me."

"Forward of course. We're all going forward with it."

"Where?"

"There's no limit. There's no problem the Computers can't solve. Social sciences, psychology, all physical problems, anything."

He looked out the window. The sun lancing off the shiny domes and spires pleasantly blinded him. "I was there," he whispered. "I saw the Computer, they let me go through part of it because I'd passed the test. I'll be there, working with the Big Computer. A thousand relays on one relay track! Each rack covering six thousand square feet—and over ten thousand racks! It's so big—I can't tell you what it was like."

"Then don't try, Sam. Don't strain your mind. Save it for the Plan."

"And I saw—just a glimpse—the Blue Light!"

"Really, Sam?"

"Honest, I saw it!"

"Did you take any offerings with you?"

"Flora—I'm sorry—I really am sorry, because I thought you would be as glad and as proud as I am."

"Oh, I am glad and proud, Sam. Because the Plan's done something for me, too. It's changed my little pipe-dreams to the real thing. Because I've made up my mind. I'm getting out. Oh I'll wait until you're well established in this new job, but then I'm going out of the City, out of the Plan—as far away as I can go."

He felt sick at his stomach. She was crazy and he'd never suspected.

"Bet you never noticed what it's like out of the City, did you, Sam? It's quiet out there. That's right. Quiet. You've been in the country haven't you, Sam, once or twice anyway? Did you notice the green forest and the blue sky, how restful they are? There's peace and quiet and relaxation and sanity out there, Sam, somewhere. And I'm going to find it. I think maybe there's a chance to live out there somewhere. I'm not sure, but I think so. And I'm glad too, and proud, Sam, because now I've got the nerve to go looking for it."

"Flora—"

"Goodbye, Sam."

"I—"

"Goodbye, Sam. Good thinking."

He didn't see her again. When he came back to the apartment, she was gone, to a neural show, or someplace. He walked a while. He went to a public sleep palace and plugged in a couple of dreams, each three hours long, and the next day he got the call.

He forgot Flora, and their apartment and everything except the fruition of all he'd ever dreamed about. And he hopped into his private gyro and moved like a streak of silver light through the metal-shining towers, over the sky-ways and up and down the tube-ways, glinting and spinning and giving off the luster of the City. And he was there.

He sat in the waiting cubicle, staring at the blank metal walls. It was very quiet in there, and he was all alone. The cubicle was spheroid, and though the air was oxygenated and cool, he found himself gasping now and then as though he needed fresh air.

Flora had put a doubt in his mind that didn't belong there or anywhere else. She really had been scared, and her idea of getting out, that had been genuine too. But somehow, he couldn't think of her as being crazy. She had some reason for being so frightened. And he thought, for the very first time—what happens after your service with the Blue Light is up? You go to the Islands, they said. You were retired, they said, sent to the Islands—the workers' paradise where your life was your own and you could do as you wished—free of all official duties to the Plan.

No one ever saw a worker again, if he was chosen for the Blue Light. Of course everyone knew that, but now Forbes was thinking about it, in a somewhat negativistic way. Why couldn't you come back into the Plan when your duty in the Computer was up? Why was it considered necessary to give anyone an escape from something so wonderful as the Plan? Working with the Blue Light was the final service, and the Islands were a final reward. And besides why should there be a need for the islands, why should any reward be more of a reward than the Plan itself?

He watched the door opening and his body began to tingle all over. The two attendants took Forbes' hands and took him through the door, down a long shiny metal tube. Doubts vanished, and he felt the pride returning, the culmination of ambition.

He was one of the chosen, the highest honor was his, Sam Forbes'. His brain was superior. His synopsis worked faster, his brain cells and his neural circuits operated with better coordination and cooperation, the two really important things.

They moved downward in a narrowing spiral, and the blue light sifted in around them, a mistiness at first seeping and then deepening as though the sky was falling. The Blue Light—core of the Computer, heart of the City, the very center of Life. It was the heart and soul of the Plan, and the nerve-roots of Man.

He knew the source of the Blue Light he thought proudly. The selectrons used phosphor-coated storage surfaces, and the phosphor gave blue light.

That was where real thought went on in the Computer. The photo-multiplier was more sensitive to blue light.

The Computer meant everything to Sam Forbes, and to everyone. It solved things, everything, with an efficiency beyond the powers of thousands of men in many lifetimes, and it solved them in minutes, oftener in seconds. It figured out everything, not only how things were to be done, but why, when, and where. The Computer was bridging the final gaps between man and his environment, between man and the Universe itself.

That was something everyone knew—except for people like Flora, of course, who just didn't understand. The Computer reduced life to statistics, to meaning. It spelled out meaning in special electronic alphabets, and vocabulary, thinking transformed into a series of binary digits, fed in on paper tape, picked up by electronic ears and eyes.

The great, general over-all plan controlled the present, extended itself into the future further than anything but the Computer could see, and behind the Plan, the Computer always, grinding out answers, at once superhuman, and subhuman. Subhuman because, after all, it was only a machine. Superhuman, well, because of the things it did.

The Blue Light was stronger, much stronger, warm and waiting and still.

What would his duties be? Why was isolation necessary all during the job, and after the job? He was nervous and full of tingling anticipation.

"In here," said one of the attendants as he shook hands with Forbes. "Goodbye! You won't be forgotten."

What? Of course not. I never expected to-be. Why would I be forgotten?

He had never been in here before, in the very heart of the Computer.

Around him, everywhere, above, below, surrounding him—diods, rectifiers, giant vacuum tubes, voltage amplifiers, input frequencies, electromotive forces whirring, modulation products, side-bands, and a giant Selectron center. Phosphor-coated storage surfaces radiated the blue light, so strongly here it seemed almost black. Around him, were the blue-light-giving memory cells of the Computer, walls and walls and skins of wire. And he felt the silent, invisible and massive murmuring of the machines.

"STEP on this," the attendant said. A disc, all brightly shining, something to clamp his feet in. Then the attendants were gone and he was going down, deep and fast. Light went out overhead and he was sliding down as tightly inside the opaque tube as a piston in a cylinder. Sam's nerves and tissues contracted, his hair crackled and fluttered. The top of the tube slid down, and the metal clamped onto the top of his head. He was pressed in tightly and then more tightly until he was bottled up like a cork and couldn't move. He kept his eyes shut.

Electrodes, he thought vaguely. He was scared now. Now he was beginning to learn about fear, the meaning of the light in Flora's eyes.

Then—he knew just before the current hit him that he was somehow part of a circuit. And then for a while, he stopped knowing . . .

His eyes tearing loose from their sockets, and his body spasming. And darkness that had a deep blue texture like starless night . . .

He came to, in a world of horror fused with the invisible world around him, with wires and plates and coils and tubes. Nausea burning and the awful solidness pressing in and up and down, holding him fast forever.

He breathed in and the pain shocked him to oppressive semi-consciousness. He dimly noticed his elbows then. Plastic tubes had been attached—extensions of his veins and arteries. From somewhere they were giving him blood, taking out the old, pumping in the new. They intended to keep him alive.

Caught between compensators and amplifiers, or maybe inside a feedback network, he thought wildly, he would live. As a tube or something, as a part of the Selectronic heart of the Computer, the thinking machine, the memory cells, of a complex-interlooping, and looping and over-looping—

Dully, Sam thought of what was happening. Right now maybe the Computer, or this particular section of it, was at rest. He had a little time to think before the currents of calculation caught him up again in its whirling winding process. His time was up.

He knew it was coming. He could feel it now, sense its approach, from far away, through miles of complexity. Coming in, growing, whispering, rising inputs, and through the intricate circuits. Round and about through compensator and amplifier and prime remover and load and response signals and feedback network glowing bluer and bluer with thought intensity. Part of the photo-multiplier, part of the great blue light of thinking. He had a good brain, good reflexes and fast responses. He was a good fit, a fine fit—

He screamed, but his body was as rigid as steel, and the thousands of relays round him—on the thousands of relay racks through the layers and layers and height and depth—worked and moved and he was part of them.

Again, his body fell inward in hot, damp, quivering relaxation. The complexity that stretched away in all directions, the pulsing, the power, the life that flowed through him, in and out. Again, the Computer would be at rest now, awaiting some important problem of the Plan. He had helped solve a big problem for the Plan and for everybody. What had he helped solve? Something important certainly. Some vector-factor in a big social process maybe, something so big no one man could ever know what it was—but now the Computer was resting again.

It had reached a point when it didn't have so many problems as in the beginning, so it could rest more often.

When it rested, Forbes could think, could feel, a little. Feel pain. Feel a pain that no one could live with very long—or die with either.

"Forbes!"

What was that? His mind strained. A voice calling his name?

"Forbes. Is that your name?"

No! No voice could get in here. A thought. It was like a thought coming to him. Crazy, hearing things, thinking things that weren't but that he wished were.

There seemed to be other's thoughts everywhere, some far away, others near, a jumble of mental whispering and wavering neural cries. Was that possible? No, he was crazy. Pain would do that.

Wait now. There!

"Who are you? Are you somebody?" he called.

"Yes, I'm somebody. George Calvin. Call me George."

"George!"

"You just got plugged in?"

"Yes, yes! But I'm crazy. How could another man's thoughts—?"

"You're not crazy, Forbes. If you were crazy they'd pull you. They pull a defective part immediately. Sometimes they give it a shock or two, but they almost always pull a defective part."

The thought cut off. The Computer quivered. Forbes sank down into a moist cloud of spasming pain. His eyes bulged out and then closed slowly; his body drooped and seemed to fall apart cell by cell. Then frantically he was thinking again, calling.

"GEORGE!"

"Yes?"

"How long have you been in here?"

"I don't know. You can't know that, how could you tell, in here I mean?"

"I guess you never could tell, could you. How can we communicate like this?"

"We're hooked up, part of the same circuit, Forbes. Part of the Computer's Selectron section, where the thinking cells are."

"Yes, I know that, George. George, call me Sam. Will you do that?"

"Sure, Sam. And we're part of the machine, and the machine's a part of us. Isn't that a wonderful thing, Sam? Isn't it? Isn't it a terrific thing, I ask you?"

Sam didn't answer. He should have said yes, but he thought of Flora, and he remembered some things she had said, and the way she had described things that, at the time, he hadn't thought about at all. Little, intimate trivial things. He would have thought they were important if he were back there listening to her now. So he didn't answer George Calvin.

"Sam. We're Polyoids, and when we burn out, we're replaced. There are other volunteers, others waiting, like us, Sam. There'll always be someone intelligent and brave enough to serve. Isn't it a great thing to be a part of the Computer, Sam, to help solve all the problems of man?"

And then the greatness of which George spoke came again, went through Forbes' body, through the circuits and the brain like a blast of flame. He strained up hard against immutable hardness, his body tearing and his eyes bulging. From Polyoid to Forbes between alternating currents. From Forbes to Polyoid between current distortions.

"One thing I've regretted though, in a way, Sam. My wife. She'll be lonely—

that's what she told me. I guess there's a lot of women that don't understand the Plan. My wife was sweet, Sam, but selfish. They can't think in bigness like the Plan."

Sam kept his eyes closed.

"You got a wife outside, Sam?"

"Shut up! She's out there all right. She's lucky. Lucky you hear me?"

"Sam—what kind of talk is that?"

This time, he hardly felt it. Maybe they did something to you to make you adjust to such treatment as this. He didn't know. It was when he came to again that he felt the aftermath, and he knew there would be no anesthetic to the pain that came after. He felt George Calvin's thoughts again, and those of others, swarming, circling in through the circuits and channels, everything wormingly alive with cries, screams, shrieks, bedlam in the mind, chaos no one could put into words, and the flickering power of the Computer fading back through the corridors.

His muscles jerked. Where was he? What kind of a dream was he having? Maybe he would wake up any time now and—

His chest flamed. His throat burned.

"George!"

"Yes!"

"What happens to us after this?"

"We burn out. Some last longer than others, but all of us go eventually."

"Burn out!" Sam screamed. "Burn out?"

"It's all right, it doesn't last too long, Sam. Here's the way I got it figured out. A brief history, in case you don't have it figured out. Between the operations of the Computer you have time to yourself, when you can think for yourself, and you pick up some of the thoughts of others in your circuit then. I understand this old machine, Sam, I been here a while. It's a question of memory cells. They had to be multitudinous and small, the more memory cells the machine has the more the machine can store away, learn, the more tables and materials it has on hand, the more complicated routines, you see how that is, Sam?"

"Yes, yes—!"

"So they got the idea of the Computer having to be complex, complex enough to run everything, mechanize life and the whole social structure because after the big blow-up they didn't want any more mistakes like that. So we got the Plan, and it had to be more complex than any machine could ever be. Oh they built wonderful machines, but still—only machines, subhuman, see Sam?"

"Yes, I see."

"So the machine stored ten million binary digits, which still fell far short of the least estimated size of one human brain by a factor of one thousand to ten thousand. You see, one human brain has ten billion nerve cells. They could never make a machine as complex as the human brain, but no human

brain could ever be as reliable as a machine, so they combine the two. Plug in human brains—polyoids—into the machine! You see the advantages of the combination, Sam—the machine's reliability and stability, plus the incalculable complexity of many human brains! And now each human brain is just a unit of the whole. When it burns out, or goes haywire—short circuits or something—it's replaced."

"But when the Computer's solving a problem I'm unconscious," Forbes shouted. "I'm not thinking—"

"But you are, you are, man! Not separately, not individually of course, but as part of the whole, Sam. It's the whole Computer that really thinks, when it's working out a problem. No one man could be a part of such terrifically big and fast thought processes. But we do our little part!"

"I see," Sam's thoughts whispered. "Goodbye, Flora . . . I hope you've gotten away. I hope you made it."

"Sam—I don't believe this is going on much longer for me, Sam. I can't think so well, when the Computer isn't doing anything. I forget. I—sometimes it seems so long between the times when I remember anything—"

Burning out, Forbes thought. He opened his eyes. He could see nothing around him now but the deep blue glowing, and he felt as though he had been lowered into the bottom of a sea.

"George."

"Yes."

"I thought we were retired, to the Islands. But if we die in here—"

"Oh, we don't die, Sam. We burn out. Didn't I tell you? Maybe we're taken to the Islands, but I don't think it will mean much to us, not after we're burned out."

Burned out. The cellular structure, the intricate circuits of the mind and nervous system, they would fuse, melt, short-circuit, of course. But Sam couldn't know how it would be to have his mind burned out.

There were cycles. But there seemed to be no time anymore, no time at all.

First the warning hum, approaching, growing, the murmuring and whirring all round him increasing and rising, then the shock, the awful spasming and popping of eyes and searing of flesh and after that the pain and after the pain a few moments of free thought. Then the anticipation, and the first warning hum again . . .

That was the way it went, round and round, and finally he thought only of Flora, and the things she had loved and talked about, and had tried to talk to him about. He thought about them, until from the memory of her words, he could construct mental visions.

The forests with soft green hair and cool arms of moss over the streams, the clear cold rivers, and the lakes that waited in treasured silences like the laps of lovely women . . . Forests at night and the quiet that was not really

quiet at all but a friendly silence that was alive, filled with whispers of mouths unseen and unheard and warm friendly eyes. Fields that changed color in the spring and the fall, and the blue-misted mountains beyond, and beyond all that, the dreams—the dreams one had when one was free.

Now he knew, and now he thought about them. And now he remembered every word, phrase, sentence, even the inflections she had used. He remembered the number of tiny wrinkles that had appeared by her eyes when she laughed, and the slightly crooked slant of her nose, the shape of her ears, and the way the flecks of gold shone in her eyes. He remembered things he had never even thought he was aware of.

He remembered her asking where he was going, and now he could answer but she couldn't hear.

"I'm going to be a polyoid in the depths of a selectron."

Flora, what problems am I helping to solve now? Or are you too far away to care? I hope you are. There aren't so many problems coming in now, or maybe I just don't remember. And it seems to take longer and longer for the Computer to solve one problem. The problems get more complex all the time I guess.

Maybe they will need more and more polyoids . . .

His independent thought became less and less frequent. George Calvin became lost, and Sam felt mental contact with many others fading too. One time he thought he was aware of someone being replaced, but he wasn't sure.

He wasn't sure of anything now, except that he was helping solve very great and complex problems—helping the Plan move forward.

And then—he didn't know when it was of course or where—Sam Forbes opened his eyes for the last time.

All around him, the lake of blue flame. The blue ocean swirling faster, deepened to a darker and darker shade. And the last thing he saw was the warm, sentient womb of the Great Blue Light of thought.

WHEN A READER IS THE EDITOR!

We, of MARVEL, want you to decide which authors and illustrators you want to see in your sf magazine.

AUTHORS:

ILLUSTRATORS:

(Send it in with your Letters To The Editor.)

CAPTAIN WYXTPHLL'S FLYING SAUCER

by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

THE Flying Saucer came down vertically through the clouds, braked to a halt about fifty feet from the ground, and settled with a considerable bump on a patch of heather-strewn moorland.

"That," said Captain Wyxtpthll, "was a lousy landing." He did not, of course, use precisely these words: to human ears his remarks would have sounded rather like the clucking of an angry hen. Master Pilot Krtclugg unwound three of his tentacles from the control panel, stretched all four of his legs, and relaxed comfortably.

"Not my fault the automatics have packed up again," he grumbled. "But what do you expect with a ship that should have been scrapped five thousand years ago? If those cheese-paring form-fillers back at Base Planet—"

"Oh, all right! We're down in one piece, which is more than I expected. Tell Crysteel and Danstor to come in here. I want a word with them before they go."



"We shouldn't be gone more than a couple of hours..."

Crysteel and Danstor were, very obviously, of a different species from the rest of the crew. They had only one pair of legs and arms, no eyes at the back of the head, and other physical deficiencies which their colleagues did their best to overlook. These very defects, however, had made them the obvious choice for this particular

It was their very physical defects that won them this important assignment—their having only one pair of arms, and no eyes in the back of their heads . . .

mission, for it had needed only a minimum of disguise to let them pass as human beings under all but the closest scrutiny.

"Now you're perfectly sure," said the Captain, "that you understand your instructions?"

"Of course," replied Crysteel, slightly huffed. "This isn't the first time I've made contact with a primitive race. My training in anthropology..."

"Good. And the language?"

"Well, that's Danstor's business, but I can speak it reasonably fluently now. It's a very simple language, and after all we've been studying their radio programs for a couple of years."

"Any other points before you go?"

"Er—there's just one matter." Crysteel hesitated slightly. "It's quite obvious from their broadcasts that the social system is very primitive, and that crime and lawlessness are widespread. Many of the wealthier citizens have to use what are called 'detectives' or 'special agents' to protect their lives and property. Now we know it's against regulations, but we were wondering..."

"What?"

"Well, we'd feel much safer if we could take a couple of Mark III disrupters with us."

"Not on your life! I'd be court-martialled if they heard about it at the Base. Suppose you killed some of the natives—then I'd have the Bureau of Interstellar Politics, the Aborigines Conservancy Board, and half a dozen others after me."

"There'd be just as much trouble if *we* got killed," Crysteel pointed out with considerable emotion. "After all, you're responsible for our safety. Remember that radio play I was telling you about? It described a typical household—but there were two murders in the first half hour!"

"Oh, very well. But only a Mark II—we don't want you to do too much damage if there is trouble."

"Thanks a lot: that's a great relief. I'll report every thirty minutes as arranged. We shouldn't be gone more than a couple of hours."

Captain Wyxtpthll watched them disappear over the brow of the hill. He sighed deeply.

"Why," he said, "of all the people in the ship did it have to be *those* two?"

"It couldn't be helped," answered the pilot. "All these primitive races are terrified of anything strange. If they saw *us* coming, there'd be general panic and before we knew where we were the bombs would be falling on top of us. You just can't rush these things."

Captain Wyxtpthll was absent-mindedly making a cat's cradle out of his tentacles in the way he did when he was worried.

"Of course," he said, "if they don't come back I can always go away and report the place dangerous." He brightened considerably. "Yes, that would save a lot of trouble."

"And waste all the months we've spent studying it?" said the pilot, scan-

dalized. "They won't be wasted," replied the captain, unravelling himself with a flick that no human eye could have followed. "Our report will be useful for the next survey ship. I'll suggest that we make another visit in—oh, let's say five thousand years. By then the place may be civilized—though frankly, I doubt it."

SAMUEL Higginsbotham was settling down to a snack of cheese and cider when he saw the two figures approaching along the lane. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, put the bottle carefully down beside his hedge-trimming tools, and stared with mild surprise at the couple as they came into range.

"Mornin'," he said cheerfully between mouthfuls of cheese.

The strangers paused. One was surreptitiously ruffling through a small book which, if Sam only knew, was packed with such common phrases and expressions as: "Before the weather forecast, here is a gale warning", "Stick 'em up—I've got you covered!", and "Calling all cars!" Danstor, who had no needs for these aids to memory, replied promptly enough.

"Good morning, my man," he said in his best B. B. C. accent. "Could you direct us to the nearest hamlet, village, small town or other such civilized community?"

"Eh?" said Sam. He peered suspiciously at the strangers, aware for the first time that there was something very odd about their clothes. One did not, he realized dimly, normally wear a roll-top sweater with a smart pin-striped suit of the pattern fancied by city gents. And the fellow who was still fussing with the little book was actually wearing full evening dress which would have been faultless apart from the lurid green and red tie, the hob-nailed boots, and the cloth cap. Crysteel and Danstor had done their best, but they had seen too many television plays. When one considers that they had no other source of information, their sartorial aberrations were at least understandable.

Sam scratched his head. Furriners, I suppose, he told himself. Not even the townsfolk got themselves up like this.

He pointed down the road and gave them explicit directions in an accent so broad that no one residing outside the range of the B. B. C.'s West Regional transmitter could have understood more than one word in three. Crysteel and Danstor, whose home planet was so far away that Marconi's first signals couldn't possibly have reached it yet, did even worse than this. But they managed to get the general idea and retired in good order, both wondering if their knowledge of English was as good as they had believed.

So came and passed, quite uneventfully and without record in the history books, the first meeting between humanity and beings from Outside.

"I suppose," said Danstor thoughtfully, but without much conviction, "that he wouldn't have done? It would have saved us a lot of trouble."

"I'm afraid not. Judging by his clothes, and the work he was obviously en-

gaged upon, he could not have been a very intelligent or valuable citizen. I doubt if he could even have understood who we were."

"Here's another one!" said Danstor, pointing ahead.

"Don't make sudden movements that might cause alarm. Just walk along naturally, and let him speak first."

The man ahead strode purposefully towards them, showed not the slightest signs of recognition, and before they had recovered was already disappearing into the distance.

"Well!" said Danstor.

"It doesn't matter," replied Crysteel philosophically. "He probably wouldn't have been any use either."

"That's no excuse for bad manners!"

They gazed with some indignation at the retreating back of Professor Fitzsimmons as, wearing his oldest hiking outfit and engrossed in a difficult piece of atomic theory, he dwindled down the lane. For the first time, Crysteel began to suspect uneasily that it might not be as simple to make contact as he had optimistically believed.

Little Milton was a typical English village, nestling at the foot of the hills whose higher slopes now concealed so portentous a secret. There were very few people about on this summer morning, for the men were already at work and the womenfolk were still tidying up after the exhausting task of getting their lords and masters safely out of the way. Consequently Crysteel and Danstor had almost reached the center of the village before their first encounter, which happened to be with the village postman, cycling back to the office after completing his rounds. He was in a very bad temper, having had to deliver a penny postcard to Dodgson's farm, a couple of miles off his normal route. In addition, the weekly parcel of laundry which Gunner Evans sent home to his doting mother had been a lot heavier than usual: as well it might since it contained four tins of bully beef pinched from the cook-house.

"Excuse me," said Danstor politely.

"Can't stop," said the postman, in no mood for casual conversation. "Got another round to do." Then he was gone.

"This is really the limit!" protested Danstor. "Are they *all* going to be like this?"

"You've simply got to be patient," said Crysteel. "Remember their customs are quite different from ours—it may take some time to gain their confidence. I've had this sort of trouble with primitive races before. Every anthropologist has to get used to it."

"Hmm," said Danstor. "I suggest that we call at some of their houses. Then they won't be able to run away."

"Very well," agreed Crysteel doubtfully. "But avoid anything that looks like a religious shrine, otherwise we may get into trouble."

Old Widow Tomkins' council-house could hardly have been mistaken, even by the most inexperienced of explorers, for such an object. The old lady was

agreeably excited to see two gentlemen standing on her doorstep, and noticed nothing at all odd about their clothes. Visions of unexpected legacies, of newspaper reporters asking about her 100th birthday (she was really only 95, but had managed to keep it dark) flashed through her mind. She picked up the slate she kept hanging by the door and went gaily forth to greet her visitors.

"You'll have to write it down," she simpered, holding out the slate. "I've been deaf this last twenty years."

Crysteel and Danstor looked at each other in dismay. This was a completely unexpected snag, for the only written characters they had ever seen were television program announcements, and they had never fully deciphered those. But Danstor, who had an almost photographic memory, rose to the occasion. Holding the chalk very awkwardly, he wrote a sentence which, he had reason to believe, was in common use during such breakdowns in communication.

As her mysterious visitors walked sadly away, old Mrs. Tomkins stared in baffled bewilderment at the marks on her slate. It was some time before she deciphered the characters—Danstor had made several mistakes—and even then she was little the wiser.

TRANSMISSIONS WILL BE RESUMED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

It was the best that Danstor could do: but the old lady never did get to the bottom of it.

They were a little luckier at the next house they tried. The door was answered by a young lady whose vocabulary consisted largely of giggles, and who eventually broke down completely and slammed the door in their faces. As they listened to the muffled, hysterical laughter, Crysteel and Danstor began to suspect with sinking hearts, that their disguise as normal human beings was not as effective as they had intended.

At Number 3, on the other hand, Mrs. Smith was only too willing to talk—at 120 words to the minute in an accent as impenetrable as Sam Higginsbotham's. Danstor made his apologies as soon as he could get in a word edgewise, and moved on.

"Doesn't *anyone* talk as they do on the radio?" he lamented. "How do they understand their own programs if they all speak like this?"

"I think we must have landed in the wrong place," said Crysteel, even his optimism beginning to fail. It sagged still further when he had been mistaken, in swift succession, for a Gallup Poll investigator, the prospective conservative candidate, a vacuum cleaner salesman, and a dealer from the local black market.

At the sixth or seventh attempt they ran out of housewives. The door was opened by a gangling youth who clutched in one clammy paw an object which at once hypnotized the visitors. It was a magazine whose cover displayed a giant rocket climbing upwards from a crater-studded planet which, whatever it might be, was obviously not the Earth. Across the background were the words: "Staggering Stories of Pseudo-Science. Price 25 cents."

Crysteel looked at Danstor with a "Do you think what I think?" expression which the other returned. Here at last, surely, was someone who could understand them. His spirits mounting, Danstor addressed the youngster.

"I think you can help us," he said politely. "We find it very difficult to make ourselves understood here. You see, we've just landed on this planet from space and we want to get into touch with your government."

"Oh," said Jimmy Williams, not yet fully returned to Earth from his vicarious adventures among the outer moons of Saturn. "Where's your spaceship?"

"It's up in the hills: we didn't want to frighten anyone."

"Is it a rocket?"

"Good gracious no. They've been obsolete for thousands of years."

"Then how does it work? Does it use atomic power?"

"I suppose so," said Danstor, who was pretty shaky on physics. "Is there any other kind of power?"

"This is getting us nowhere," said Crysteel, impatient for once. "We've got to ask *him* questions. Try and find where there are some officials we can meet."

Before Danstor could answer, a stentorian voice came from inside the house.

"Jimmy! Who's there?"

"Two . . . men," said Jimmy, a little doubtfully. "At least, they look like men. They've come from Mars. I always said that was going to happen."

There was the sound of ponderous movements, and a lady of elephantine bulk and ferocious mien appeared from the gloom. She glared at the strangers, looked at the magazine Jimmy was carrying, and summed up the situation.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" she cried, rounding on Crysteel and Danstor. "It's bad enough having a good-for-nothing son in the house who wastes all his time reading this rubbish, without grown men coming along putting more ideas into his head. Men from Mars, indeed! I suppose you've come in one of those flying saucers!"

"But I never mentioned Mars—" protested Danstor feebly.

Slam! From behind the door came the sound of violent altercation, the unmistakable noise of tearing paper, and a wail of anguish. And that was that.

"Well," said Danstor at last. "What do we try next? And why did he say we came from Mars? That isn't even the nearest planet, if I remember correctly."

"I don't know," said Crysteel. "But I suppose it's natural for them to assume that we come from some close planet. They're going to have a shock when they find the truth. Mars, indeed! That's even worse than here, from the reports I've seen." He was obviously beginning to lose some of his scientific detachment.

"Let's leave the houses for a while," said Danstor. "There must be some more people outside."

This statement proved to be perfectly true, for they had not gone much further before they found themselves surrounded by small boys making incomprehensible but obviously rude remarks.

"Should we try and placate them with gifts?" said Danstor anxiously. "That usually works among more backward races"

"Well, have you brought any?"

"No, I thought you—"

Before Danstor could finish, their tormenters took to their heels and disappeared down a side street. Coming along the road was a majestic figure in a blue uniform.

Crysteel's eyes lit up.

"A policeman!" he said. "Probably going to investigate a murder somewhere. But perhaps he'll spare us a minute," he added, not very hopefully.

P. C. Hinks eyed the strangers with some astonishment but he managed to keep his feelings out of his voice.

"Hello, gents. Looking for anything?"

"As a matter of fact, yes," said Danstor in his friendliest and most soothing tone of voice. "Perhaps you can help us. You see, we've just landed on this planet and want to make contact with the authorities."

"Eh?" said P. C. Hinks startled. There was a long pause—though not too long, for P. C. Hinks was a bright young man who had no intention of remaining a village constable all his life. "So you've just landed, have you? In a spaceship, I suppose?"

"That's right," said Danstor, immensely relieved at the absence of the incredulity, or even violence, which such announcements all too often provoked on the more primitive planets.

"Well, well!" said P. C. Hinks, in tones which he hoped would inspire confidence and feelings of amity. (Not that it mattered much if the both became violent—they seemed a pretty skinny pair.) "Just tell me what you want, and I'll see what we can do about it."

"I'm so glad," said Danstor. "You see, we've landed in this rather remote spot because we don't want to create a panic. It would be best to keep our presence known to as few people as possible until we have contacted your government."

"I quite understand," replied P. C. Hinks, glancing round hastily to see if there was anyone through whom he could send a message to his sergeant. "And what do you propose to do then?"

"I'm afraid I can't discuss our long-term policy with regard to Earth," said Danstor cagily. "All I can say is that this section of the Universe is being surveyed and opened up for development—and we're quite sure we can help you in many ways."

"That's very nice of you," said P. C. Hinks heartily. "I think the best thing is for you to come along to the station with me so that we can put through a call to the Prime Minister."

"Thank you very much," said Danstor, full of gratitude. They walked trustingly beside P. C. Hinks, despite his slight tendency to keep behind them, until they reached the village police station.

"This way, gents," said P. C. Hinks politely ushering them into a room which was really rather poorly lit and not at all well furnished, even by the somewhat primitive standards they had expected. Before they could fully take in their surroundings, there was a "click" and they found themselves separated from their guide by a large door composed entirely of iron bars.

"Now don't worry," said P. C. Hinks. "Everything will be quite all right. I'll be back in a minute."

Crysteel and Danstor gazed at each other with a wild surmise that rapidly deepened to a dreadful certainty.

"We're locked in!"

"This is a prison!"

"Now what are we going to do?"

"I don't know if you chaps understand English," said a languid voice from the gloom, "but you might let a fellow sleep in peace."

For the first time, the two prisoners saw that they were not alone. Lying on a bed in the corner of the cell was a somewhat dilapidated young man, who gazed at them blearily out of one resentful eye.

"My goodness!" said Danstor nervously. "Do you suppose he's a dangerous criminal?"

"He doesn't look very dangerous at the moment," said Crysteel, with more accuracy than he guessed.

"What are *you* in for, anyway?" asked the stranger, sitting up unsteadily. "You look as if you've been to a fancy-dress party. Oh, my poor head!" He collapsed again into the prone position.

"Fancy locking up anyone as ill as this!" said Danstor, who was a kind-hearted individual. Then he continued, in English: "I don't know why we're here. We just told the policeman who we were and where we came from—and this is what's happened."

"Well, who are you?"

"We've just landed—"

"Oh, there's no point in going through all that again," interrupted Crysteel. "We'll never get anyone to believe us."

"Hey!" said the stranger, sitting up once more. "What language is that you're speaking? I know a few, but I've never heard anything like that."

"Oh, all right," Crysteel said to Danstor. "You might as well tell him. There's nothing else to do until that policeman comes back anyway."

At this moment, P. C. Hinks was engaged in earnest conversation with the superintendent of the local mental home, who insisted stoutly that all his patients were present. However, a careful check was promised and he'd call back later.

Wondering if the whole thing was a practical joke, P. C. Hinks put the receiver down and quietly made his way to the cells. The three prisoners seemed to be engaged in friendly conversation, so he tiptoed away again. It would do them all good to have a chance to cool down. He rubbed his eye

tenderly as he remembered what a battle it had been to get Mr. Graham into the cell during the small hours of the morning.

That young man was now reasonably sober after the night's celebrations, which he did not in the least regret. (It was, after all, quite an occasion when your degree came through and you found you'd made *Cum Laude*.) But he began to fear that he was still under the influence as Danstor unfolded his tale and waited, not expecting to be believed.

In these circumstances, thought Graham, the best thing to do was to behave as matter-of-factly as possible until the hallucinations got fed up and went away.

"If you really have a spaceship in the hills," he remarked, "surely you can get into touch with it and ask someone to come and rescue you?"

"We want to handle this ourselves," said Crysteel with dignity. "Besides, you don't know our captain."

They sounded very convincing, thought Graham: the whole story hung together remarkably well. And yet—

"It's a bit hard for me to believe that you can build interstellar spaceships, but can't get out of a miserable village police station."

Danstor looked at Crysteel, who shuffled uncomfortably.

"We could get out easily enough," said the anthropologist. "But we don't want to use violent means unless it's absolutely essential. You've no idea of the trouble it causes, and the reports we might have to fill in. Besides, if we did get out, I suppose your Flying Squad would catch us before we got back to the ship."

"Not in Little Milton," grinned Graham. "Especially if we could get across to the 'White Hart' without being stopped. My car is over there."

"Oh," said Danstor, his spirits suddenly reviving. He turned to his companion and a lively discussion followed. Then, very gingerly, he produced a small black cylinder from an inner pocket, handling it with much the same confidence as a nervous spinster holding a loaded gun for the first time. Simultaneously, Crysteel retired with some speed to the far corner of the cell.

It was at this precise moment that Graham knew, with a sudden icy certainty, that he was stone sober and that the story he had been listening to was nothing less than the truth.

There was no fuss or bother, no flurry of electric sparks or coloured rays—but a section of the wall three feet across dissolved quietly and collapsed into a little pyramid of sand. The sunlight came streaming into the cell as, with a great sigh of relief, Danstor put his mysterious weapon away.

"Well, come on," he urged Graham. "We're waiting for you."

There were no signs of pursuit, for P. C. Hinks was still arguing on the phone, and it would be some minutes yet before that bright young man returned to the cells and received the biggest shock of his official career. No one at the "White Hart" was particularly surprised to see Graham again: they all knew where and how he had spent the night, and expressed the hope that the local

Bench would deal leniently with him when his case came up.

With grave misgivings, Crysteel and Danstor climbed into the back of the incredibly ramshackle Bentley which Graham affectionately addressed as "Rose". But there was nothing wrong with the engine under the rusty bonnet, and soon they were roaring out of Little Milton at fifty miles an hour. It was a striking demonstration of the relativity of speed, for Crysteel and Danstor, who had spent the last few years travelling tranquilly through space at several million miles a second, had never been so scared in their lives. When Crysteel had recovered his breath he pulled out his little portable transmitter and called the ship.

"We're on the way back," he shouted above the roar of the wind. "We've got a fairly intelligent human being with us. Expect us in—whoops!—I'm sorry—we just went over a bridge—about ten minutes. What was that? No, of course not. We didn't have the slightest trouble. Everything went perfectly smoothly. *Goodbye.*"

Graham looked back only once to see how his passengers were faring. The sight was rather unsettling, for their ears and hair (which had not been glued on very firmly) had blown away and their real selves were beginning to emerge. Graham began to suspect, with some discomfort, that his new acquaintances also lacked noses. Oh well, one could grow used to anything with practice. He was going to have plenty of that in the years ahead.

THE rest, of course, you all know; but the full story of the first landing on Earth, and of the peculiar circumstances under which Ambassador Graham became humanity's representative to the universe at large, has never before been recounted. We extracted the main details, with a good deal of persuasion, from Crysteel and Danstor themselves, while we were working in the Department of Extra-terrestrial affairs.

It was understandable, in view of their success on Earth, that they should have been selected by their superiors to make the first contact with our mysterious and secretive neighbours, the Martians. It is also understandable, in the light of the above evidence, that Crysteel and Danstor were so reluctant to embark on this later mission—and we are not really very surprised that nothing has ever been heard of them since.

CONTROVERSY is the life-blood of intellectual development, and all too often, publications take one side or the other, from bias, advertising pressure, or just plain fear. **MARVEL** dedicates itself to the honest presentation of those arguments which rage throughout the science-fiction field. Each issue will see a forum by leading writers in the field, presenting their opinions on the issue. It is up to you, the readers of **MARVEL SCIENCE**, to let us know which topics you would like to see your favorite writers battle out. Get those letters in now!

THE DIANETICS QUESTION

(A special Feature by the Editors of MARVEL SCIENCE)

For the first time in the short but epithet-scarred history of Dianetics, a science-fiction magazine presents all aspects of the controversy. The editors have asked three leading sf writers to give their views on Dianetics, and here are their stimulating arguments, side by side. . . .

HOMO SUPERIOR, HERE WE COME!

by L. RON HUBBARD (Pro)



"... a better human being . . ."

ON THE DAY that I received the articles by Lester del Rey and Theodore Sturgeon for comment, one of our HDA's (Hubbard Dianetic Auditor) also received an interesting bit of mail: a birthday greeting from his sister. There wasn't much of interest about the birthday greeting, except that there was a gently humorous little note attached which made you admire the person who wrote it. And I knew a story about this particular HDA's sister.

One year ago this girl was in no position to write anyone a birthday note. She was being carefully observed in a state mental institution after a long series of electric shocks, and her doctor was on the point of deciding that there was no more hope for her to completely recover, and no hope for getting her out of the hospital except through a pre-frontal lobotomy.

Today, this girl is living a normal life with her family. She has just successfully completed a business course, has secured a job, and is getting more fun out of life than in many of the years before she went into the hospital.

This is dianetics at work. The two persons who have worked with this girl had no previous training in mental therapy, and used only dianetic processing when trying to help her. The girl is not a clear. She is not even a good release. But she has come from a position where she was almost completely cut off from her environment, to the point where she is capable of leading a normal and happy life in the months since *Dianetics* was published. No observer could deny that this girl is now a better human being because of dianetics.

A friend of this girl was very much like an average person. The friend is now a release, and her happiness and effectiveness are startling to her friends. Her friend is a better human being.

The HDA who received the birthday card was well above average a year ago,

and today has passed the point of release and is working toward being a clear. His effectiveness is increasing day by day. He is markedly more friendly. He is far more dynamic, and yet makes fewer people angry. He is a better human being.

These are people I know. Their stories are paralleled by many, many others whom I know personally as warm, live human beings. Is it any wonder that Mr. Del Rey's sniping at theoretical differences seems a little out of place to me? If Mr. del Rey were sincerely interested in investigating dianetics he could easily obtain the names of the three people mentioned above, and could interview them if he so desired. But according to Mr. del Rey, "no man's opinion of what has happened to his mind is any proof of anything" so, no doubt, the girl, who less than half a year ago was considered completely hopeless by the medical supervisor of her ward, would not be able to convince Mr. del Rey that dianetics has accomplished anything for her. Not even if her logic were superior to his.

Dianeticists are well aware that a large segment of the population has grown used to the idea that the opinion of an authority, that facts and statistics presented on large charts in red letters is evidence enough to outweigh the observations which they, themselves can make. Fortunately, thousands of others are still filled with the true spirit of scientific curiosity. It is to these open-minded people that dianetics owes its first obligation. It is also these people who will be most able to carry the science of dianetics forward.

Nevertheless, the Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation is preparing evidential material which will be published as soon as it is assembled in the proper form.

The viciousness of Mr. del Rey's attack displays so clearly the aberrative force behind it, that no defense on this matter should be necessary. If one is needed, a perusal of the laws regarding the expenditure of income in a non-profit, charitable Corporation would certainly be more informative than any argument about this particular case.

One more curiosity needs to be pointed out in Mr. del Rey's article. Mr. del Rey begins by carefully trying to hang the label of racism and superiority complex on a science which proves for the first time that *all* human beings can be better human beings. But from this first brief attempt to the end of the article he argues heatedly against the idea that "common" sense and "common" judgment are any good at all.

But who, then, is not common? Who has a better right to decide for the individual than the individual himself? Is a woman less able to raise an arm that had been crippled with bursitis because I observe it, rather than a medical doctor? For that matter, is she not capable of making the observation herself? Will Mr. del Rey decide for all of us what will constitute evidence and proof to us? Will he, then, pronounce judgment on a body of knowledge he has not understood, and a technique he has not used, and suggest that others do likewise because "common" sense is rather dangerous? It appears that he has done so, but such a judgment is probably temporary with him.

For "the goal is indeed a glittering one", Mr. Ackerman, and all we ask is the kind of honest scepticism which you display, Mr. Sturgeon. Mr. del Rey will come along by and by.

P.S.: AND HUBBARD'S AGENT—FOREST J. ACKERMAN, ONE OF THE LEADING STF FANS, AGREES WITH HIS TOP CLIENT 100%!

What are you doing about becoming a superman?

The first step is to read the remarkable 180,000-word book by L. Ron Hubbard (Hermitage, \$4).

The second is to apply its principles—*whether you believe them or not*. For the test of Dianetics is not one of trust, faith or belief but of self-demonstrable proof.

The book is of especial interest to readers of science fiction because its author—the discoverer, creator, synthesizer of Dianetics—is a world-famous science fiction writer. It is unlikely that you will be unfamiliar with *all* of the following titles by him (which are only a few): "Final Blackout", "To the Stars", "Fear", "The Ultimate Adventure", "The End Is Not Yet." This sole science-fictioneer recently packed 6,000 people into a noted Los Angeles auditorium to hear him speak on his new science.

The goal of Dianetics is the *clear*. "A clear", to quote W. Bradford Shank, prominent dianeticist, "is not a God—just a superman."

This does not mean that a dianetic clear can read minds, hypnotize non-clears, foretell the future, walk on water or be impervious to bullets. But a clear is, by definition, an individual with no psychoses, neuroses, complexes, compulsions or phobias—an amazingly balanced person with neither "*innate*" fears nor aberrations, and free of all chronic somatics (pseudo aches and pains, psycho-induced).

A clear has an abundant store of energy, and needs but 4 hours sleep out of 24.

A clear has a photographic memory, can return to any moment on his (or her) time-track and re-experience anything with full perceptics (sight, sound, sensation, etc.)

Do clears exist or are they a figment of a fantasy writer's imagination? If they are real, where are they?

Well, most of them are in temporary incognito—until, numerically, they become less freakishly infrequent. You see, it is not difficult for them to compute the reaction of the *aberrée* (like you and me—unless you, like me, are a pre-clear): Most "normal" people would want to poke at them and probe, 25 hours a day, demanding "What tricks can you do? *Prove* to me you're a clear!"

I have seen a clear, and at least 6000 other people in Los Angeles have seen a clear. Her name was given publicly, so I do not see why I should not repeat it here: Sonya Bianca. I do not know what her fate may be—eventually she may change her name to escape publicity!

The subject is a gigantic one, the goal is glittering, the effort to achieve it relatively minor. We all cannot hope to fly to the Moon, Mars or the Stars in spaceships some day, but any of us can *now* engage in this great scientific experiment called Dianetics: we all can be better than we are.

HOW TO AVOID A HOLE IN THE HEAD

by THEODORE STURGEON (*Middle-Of-The-Road*)



"... You'll hear plenty of yelling ..."

IF MY WORDS on this engrossing subject seem more a plea for general openmindedness and progressive thought than a rundown on dianetics—don't be misled; that's just what they are.

Once in a while a book, or a play or an idea calls forth a reaction from the general public that is almost 100% violent. Those who are not violently opposed are violently in love with the subject at hand.

You'll find that the possessors of these violent opinions divide themselves into several categories. The two main ones are those who have familiarized themselves with the subject and those who have not. Each of these categories subdivides into many degrees of the initial violence. I have found that the primary question to ask anyone who expresses extreme opinions about dianetics is "Have you read the book?" (or at least, "Have you experienced or witnessed dianetic therapy?") If the answer is "No," it's obvious that the conversation no longer deals with dianetics, but with the protests and internal conflicts of these violent opinions.

In short, it is well to back off from violence purely because it is violence. No one who can yell louder than you can prove by doing so that he can think better than you. Concerning dianetics, you'll hear plenty of yelling on both sides.

Here are some initial suggestions and statements about dianetics.

TO THOSE WHO ARE AGIN IT:

ITEM: Read the more understandable parts of the (acutely badly-written) book—specifically the chapters on therapy and the "advice to the Pre-Clear", and then try—or observe—the therapy yourself before you start shooting your mouth off.

ITEM: Stop making such a fuss about Hubbard's terminology. If you are genuinely interested in finding out what he's driving at, you *must* consider his statements within the framework of his own hypotheses. Viewed in that light, he has every reason for creating his own technical terms. One example: Hubbard's "analytical" mind, and "reactive" mind correlate very closely to the

Freudian "conscious," and "unconscious" respectively. Now, Hubbard states that the analytical (conscious) mind is the only mind which can be *unconscious*, and that the reactive (unconscious) mind is the part of the mind which is *never* unconscious! Can you imagine the confusion in this area if he used only accepted terms?

ITEM: Stop making such a to-do about the similarity of certain phases of dianetic therapy to the techniques of other, more conventional methods. Certainly there are similarities; but there is a great deal about dianetics which is genuinely new. The principle of a burning wick is older than recorded history—almost as old as the trick of striking a spark off a piece of flint. Not too long ago some bright boy put those two together, and you light your cigarette with a new gadget. I never heard of anyone sneering at a fishtail Cadillac because it was equipped with those old-fashioned, unremarkable objects known as wheels.

ITEM: Stop picking little chips out of Hubbard's theory of structure. (Eighty percent of his book consists of this. Call it conjecture, if you like. That's what it is.) If you came up with an idea like his, how else could you describe it but by telling people how you think it works? The theory of structure which described atoms as hard balls with other hard balls circling around them has been proved fallacious; yet while it was acceptable, people were building molecular models and figuring out new carbon and silicon plastics from them. The change in accepted atomic theory did not alter chemistry; a new and better explanation of how the mind works will not change the results you get from dianetic therapy. Hubbard himself says that if and when someone comes up with a better theory of structure, he will welcome it with open arms. *But it won't change his results.*

NOW, TO THOSE WHO ARE FOR DIANETICS:

ITEM: Only a fool will accept the whole because he finds one or two of its parts acceptable. To observe some of the remarkable effects of dianetic therapy and thereby conclude, without evidence, that *all* Hubbard's theories are correct, is about as intelligent as trying to chew into a peach-tree because you found the peaches good.

ITEM: There is a deplorable proclivity in the human animal to get faddistic about certain ideas. Faith is a beautiful thing. So are forest fires, and the color of gangrene. I think faith—especially capital-F Faith—is more dangerous and more disgusting than either. It is a substitute for thought. Dianetics, for all its effectiveness, is not a panacea, and Ron Hubbard is not the Messiah. If you are feeling either of these two things, go take a cold shower.

ITEM: Don't get so cocky as you acquire experience in auditing that you think you can throw the ground-rules out. There is a high ethic involved in correct auditing, and a sound set of safeguards is built into the standard technique. When you vary them you are not practicing dianetics. If you therefore get wrong results, or no results, don't blame it on dianetics. If you want to mesmerize patients, take up hypnotherapy or narcosynthesis. If you want to

bulldoze patients into believing that they think or feel things you want them to feel, take up Reichianism. But if you want to practice—or investigate—dianetics, try dianetics. God knows it's simple enough.

TO SUM UP, THEN:

Before you can consider yourself for or agin dianetics, see it in action—preferably after having learned something about it.

If and when you get results from dianetics, don't conclude therefore that everything Hubbard says must be true. Don't consider the unproven as false, either. If it's the science its adherents claim, it will bear investigation. If it isn't, investigation will prove it false. In either case—investigate. No matter what you discover, at least you'll have the happy feeling of knowing what you're talking about when you discuss the subject.

SUPERMAN—C.O.D.

by LESTER DEL REY (Con)



"... I want to see results!"

THE SECRET FEELING that you're basically superior to your fellow man is probably more typically human than anything, except the related *doubt* that you're superior to anyone. Racism is based on the need to believe in superiority, and one of the basic factors underlying many neuroses is the doubt of even equality.

L. Ron Hubbard has capitalized on this situation in a book—printed by Hermitage House—"Dianetics", available to all at \$4.00 per copy. It isn't at all surprising that the book has been a best seller, since it gives the credulous, reason to believe that he can really be the superman he always felt he was. It also purports to be a *science*, which is the current catch-word to replace the older *black-magic* in the popular mind. The fact that it lacks a fundamental scientific basis has little to do with the average, untrained reader's idea that he is being scientific in trying out the "experiments"—totally without controls or any basis of objective evaluation—in the book.

To a careful reader, of course—or anyone who understands the semantics of either Ogden and Richards, or Korzybski—the first pages alone show the flimsiness of the "scientific" knowledge behind it. After a brief opening eulogy to himself as greater than the inventor of fire, the wheel or the arch, Mr. Hubbard says: "Dianetics is the science of the mind. Far simpler than physics or chemistry, it compares with them in the exactness of its axioms . . ."

An axiom, by the dictionary, is "a self-evident truth; a proposition or statement generally accepted as true." Neither physics nor chemistry is founded on axioms, but rather on data accumulated through observation and experiment, and accepted through universality of reproducing such an experiment. Science

cannot be based on axioms—too many of them lead to such things as the earth being the center of the universe, the sun going around it, etc. Even geometric axioms are under constant examination and doubt by mathematicians. Mr. Hubbard shows a surprising carelessness for the facts, at least for a would-be scientist.

And what are those axioms? The first one is not a self-evident truth (if such a thing can exist.) The dynamic principle of existence is SURVIVE, according to him. Sheer gobbledegook. The principle of living is living! Or, if he means the "dynamic principle" is the desire or struggle to survive—another thing—it sounds good, but is a long ways from certain. Psychologists have found just as good reason to examine a strange will to cease surviving, all wrapped up with the will to survive. It's a nice assumption, and one that *seems* safe, but it is by no means a "demonstrable" natural law, as Mr. Hubbard says—without giving us any method of demonstrating it!

There are all kinds of statements about demonstrable proof—but when we get done with the book, all we have is Hubbard's word, and the injunction to go out and try the therapy (not the proof of his "axioms" and "theories") on our friends. Surely even Mr. Hubbard must know that no man's opinion of what has happened to his mind is any proof of anything. If it were, there are thousands of people who have learned amazing "scientific" secrets through the cults, Coué was correct, millions have been cured of cancer, etc. etc. The average man's willingness to believe he is cured of anything is too well known; it's shown in the testimonials voluntarily sent to every quack medicine firm.

Where are the case histories? Hubbard cites 270 people who have been "cleared"—i. e., cured of all aberrations, given higher intelligence levels, made altruistic, etc. I can give you 1,000 as the figure I've cured by feeding hot water and raisin extract. Nothing is proved by a statement. Let's see actual scientific case histories—supposedly available, though many efforts to obtain them have failed. True, he does give us some rather interesting and sex-sadistic little stories as case histories, but they have about as much relation to case histories as the Doc Methuselah stories have.

Where are the controls? Where is the scientific rigor? Where is the proof that "cured" cases don't relapse? After watching millions of people buy the anti-histamines and "cure" their colds, you'd think people would look for better evidence next time. But Dianetics hasn't even as much experimental evidence available as had the anti-histamines.

"By their seeds shall ye know them." I've been looking for such seeds. According to the book, a *release* is an individual free from major anxieties or illnesses, and a release can be done in twenty hours. Of those taking therapy whom I know, the majority have had well over twenty hours treatment—and show no evidence of such freedom over what they had originally. They feel that they are better—though most of them do not themselves feel freed in any major way; that is just around the corner still. (In one case, release is just around the corner after some two hundred hours.)

The *clear*—the optimum individual, free of all aberrations and psychosomatic illnesses, with complete recall of his whole life, and with raised intelligence—is simply not in general evidence. I haven't been able to meet one. I was told of one, but when I met him and asked him a few simple questions, I was hastily told that he was *not* a clear. There is supposed to be one on the West Coast, on public display. Interesting, but apparently not yet properly examined. I once knew a man on the stage who could fool the average observer with perfect memory. I want to be sure this is not such a case.

Supposedly, there are 270 such people. That should be enough to interest scientific investigation. But nobody can find them, it seems. They're "incognito to keep people from bothering them." Bunk! That's kindergarten stuff; "I know, but I won't tell." A clear is defined as being altruistic and completely balanced, without aberrations. Such individuals shouldn't be so sensitive that they won't appear for scientific checks, when proof of dianetics would open it up for the countless aberrations of the world. If those timid, selfish, introverted individuals are your "clear" supermen, I want none of it.

So far, I've seen only evidences of post-hypnotic suggestion, and I want none of that either. This business of stuffing a person full of obsessions to help overcome certain deeper psychological problems may be all right, if done by men of known professional ethics, who have specialized in a careful study of the mind. But when any man with a few weeks of study can go out—no matter how ill-trained he may be—and practice it, that is dangerous.

Of course, no hypnotism is supposed to be involved. But Mr. Hubbard knows, or should know, that hypnotic suggestion is possible without loss of consciousness or a trance—he has dabbled in hypnotism enough; but he insists on playing with words. The "canceller" and other parts of reverie technique are sufficient to demonstrate to anyone familiar with hypnotism that it *is* hypnotism: The behavior of the person undergoing dianetic therapy makes it obvious to anyone skilled in hypnotism, that this is a form of hypnotic treatment.

Why go into the matter of engrams, and all the mumbo-jumbo of dianetics? They've been covered repeatedly, and they are neither new nor as simple as Hubbard tries to make them. He says it isn't the theories that matter, but the results. And even though he then turns around and uses these theories as facts later, I agree.

I want to see the results.

I want to see the scientific proof, supposedly so available. I haven't seen it. I've read and reread the book, and find no evidence. I've been surrounded by dianetic converts and patients, and their neuroses may have been changed in outlet, but remain the same in force.

Also, the false confidence of anyone who believes himself cured can substitute for a time as a cure. We know that. We also know that such a crutch may crumble under real problems, and such failure may be worse than the original trouble. The danger of a relapse hasn't been investigated—no time has elapsed to allow for such study.

Also, it's rather interesting to notice that the study is being done by men who have a major stake in seeing dianetics accepted. The royalty on the books sold, the \$500 fees, and all the other money rolling in go into a non-profit, tax-free foundation, of course: but the officers of the foundation can always draw any salary they choose for themselves. By judicious management, these men can arrange for a life-time, handsome source of income. They'd be fools not to see such possibilities, and they are not fools.

Dianetics therapy may sometimes be helpful. There may be a body of genuine worth in it. Or it may be one of the most dangerous things yet developed for anyone to fool with. We have no way of knowing. The idea that untrained people can judge this is on a par with Mr. Hubbard's curious idea that an engineer is automatically a scientist (meaning someone trained to do research.) Most engineers are simply trained to apply the discoveries of science—and even science has had difficulty with the mind.

Typically, Mr. Hubbard's "rebuttal" of my article does not offer any new evidence of scientific worth. He does not offer to produce even *one* clear!

In choosing to attack my attitude, rather than to offer more adequate answers to my questions, I am amused to find he has stated that *my* "attack displays so clearly the aberrative force behind it."

Actually, my aberrations, if any, have nothing to do with the need of facts. Nor do they change known facts. I'm sure Mr. Hubbard won't deny that even non-profit, charitable corporations pay their officers salaries, and may do so so long as the corporations have funds.

The true spirit of scientific curiosity has nothing to do with *willingness to believe*; it has to do with *desire to investigate, but to accept only on adequate evidence*. And evidence is not what I, Lester del Rey, will accept, but simply a demonstration of the many claims made in the book, (such as having some *disinterested* observers examine the clears supposedly in existence).

I never indicated there was not some good in dianetics; I specifically said there might be. I never attacked common sense, but only requested that it be used (and its use would preclude a man's opinion of his own mental condition, so long as we cannot even accept a man's statement as to his own sanity). I did not accuse dianetics of either racism or having a superiority complex; I said that its success is due to the insecurity behind racism, etc.

Please, Mr. Hubbard, at least stick to the facts as to what I said!

Common-sense indicated that dianetics is much too risky for its use generally, or for a parlor game. After all, if the common judgment had been used as a test, morphine would have been accepted as a remarkable cure-all, second only to heroin!

All writers and readers are invited to voice their opinions on the subject. We will print as many letters as space will allow in our next issue. Send in your letters—pro and con—to Feature Editor, MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES, Stadium Publishing Corporation, 350 Fifth Ave., New York 1, N.Y.



Under the Lens

Dear Editor:

Hey! Second issue of MARVEL on the stands! 'about time. I was beginning to wonder if you'd stopped loving us poor suffering fans. I read S-F because I like it, see? And that means I want to see more new issues on the stands. If you can see your way clear to putting out an issue every second Wednesday, I guarantee to keep buying 'em. Fair enough?

So, okay. Now let's look at the February issue of MARVEL. Cover: Not bad. A little too much writing on it, maybe, and there is such a thing as too much red and yellow, y'know—but I'm not complaining. After all, there's no BEM on the cover, and believe me, that's something!

Contents page: Cluttered up. Get rid of those stars.

Inside illos: All by Napoli. Hm-m-m. Not too bad, particularly the one for the Last Spaceman, but there are other artists (I think). 'Nuff said.

Stories: THE LAST SPACEMAN. Best in the issue, Del Rey can still do it. Let's have more by him!

THE MAN: Second. Got a little involved toward the end, but I like.

FORBIDDEN WEAPON: Those rails were a nice idea, but the plot was sort of routine.

THE DIFFERENCE: Oops! Put this one third. Nice job all around. Couldn't see what the hero was so upset about, though. No matter how things turned out, he could've ended up with a beautiful, intelligent, loving wife. Oh, well.

TRANS-PLUTONIAN: Would have rated higher if the hero hadn't been such a dope. Even I knew what would happen if he went out after that gal! (And I wasn't even there.) (On second thought, maybe I was. That little frog-like feller in the foreground of the illo reminds me of me.)

THE RED STUFF AND GIRL WHO PRACTISED AKLAT: Really not too bad at that, but the others were better.

That about does it. Let's see a bigger UNDER THE LENS and THE TEST TUBE.

Oh, yeah. You say the next issue is gonna be something special.

Okay, friend—I'm waiting!

LAURENCE H. FELTNER
New York, N.Y.

Dear Ed:

Well MARVEL'S out again and it's time to write (ahem). You've made an improvement over the last issue, which is good (very). The Saunders cover was keen. One thing about the cover—please take the printing off the cover, except that which is necessary. You ruin a perfectly good cover otherwise.

I hope you go bi-monthly soon. After the subscriptions start coming in I'm sure you will. A better looking contents page would help a lot for appearances' sake.

Stories: THE MAN—Not as good as I expected but readable. Walton seems to be improving steadily.

FORBIDDEN WEAPON—I enjoy Coppel in a (excuse the expression) rival mag. I'm happy to say he was good in this one too.

The novelettes were up to par. Who is DeRosso? Like to see more of him. The short stories—surprisingly enough—were good. You usually don't find all the shorts "good" in any mag.

SUGGESTION DEPARTMENT:

- 1) Arrange the departments better.
- 2) Get Bradbury.
- 3) Longer letter column.
- 4) Better grade paper.

I leave you hoping I'll see a bi-monthly soon.

JAN ROMANOFF
26601 So. Western
Lomita, Calif.

Glad you liked the issue, Jan. We think this one is an improvement. Hope you like this Saunders as well as the last, and as you've probably noticed, the cover is practically naked. As for Bradbury, well we tried.

—ED.

Dear Editor:

Just finished the February issue of MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES. All in all, a definite improvement over the first since its rebirth. Keep up the good work, and we'll all love you.

This is the first letter to a magazine I've ever written, but I've got some beefs I want to get off my chest, and you're the lucky publication I'm going to do it in. (Don't get mad.)

First—Why should scientifiction magazines publish only scientifiction? (Try pronouncing that! Who ever thought up that word anyway?) I like (please turn to page 128)

Okay Laurence, how do you like the line-up of artists this issue? We know you just love that dark-blue background. Let us know how we look now. You know how hard it is to see from this close.

—ED.

THE C I R C L E



He called her name
and she answered.

by MILTON LESSER

Why should it matter to her whether this was Earth or not? After all, they'd been to the ends of the expanding universe and seen ten thousand galaxies. What difference could it possibly make to them—these two immortal, indestructible, Lords Of Creation?

SHE SPREAD her arms wide, and they took in what the gaze of her bright young eyes took in, the low green hills undulating to the horizon in all directions. "So this is Earth," she said.

Her husband smiled. He loved the eager fires of her girlishness—as if she were no older than the time it would take this planet to sweep about its parent sun in twenty revolutions.

She was, however, ageless.

He took her hand, only from habit, only because he had held it thus more eons than he could remember, and because it would be more comforting for them both if he took it than if he let it remain at her side.

"Why are you doing that?" she asked him. She had never asked such a question before, and so he had supposed that the gesture, for her at least, had been meaningless. Now that he knew it wasn't, the knowledge left him a little afraid.

He did not attempt to answer her. Instead, he said: "Don't bet that this is Earth. We just think it is, but we can't be sure. It isn't so simple to trace a

planet half way across the universe. There's the planet's revolution about its sun, the sun's motion as an independent member of its star-cluster, the motion of the cluster itself, the rotation of the galactic arm about the galactic equator, the galaxy itself speeding through space, the family of galaxies which it follows in a pre-destined path, a lot of other things. We don't even know for sure if this is the right galaxy.

"Does it matter, my dear? Does it really matter if this is Earth or not?"

There he went again—*my dear*. It had been ages since the phrase had lost any real meaning for him, yet he used it. Pointless . . .

"Certainly it matters," she whispered. "It matters, and this is Earth. I know it. I can feel it. It's good to be home—"

He sensed a bubbling quality in her voice, the sound a brook makes when it rushes through a forest glen. Silly analogy. Not every planet you visited had a brook, had anything like a brook. And what, exactly, was a forest glen . . . ?

"Great," he said, tonelessly, hardly hearing the word, not comprehending its meaning, sensing that if he did come upon something great (whatever the word meant) he'd hardly know it.

THEY WALKED. They had all the time in the universe. They had more time than the earth, itself, had as it went spinning around the sun.

Day faded into night and the span of the Milky Way rainbowed across the sky, and he knew at least that they stood on the fringe of a galactic arm. Why should the pale band be more satisfying, more beautiful, than the million blazing beacons you saw from the middle of a cluster? He did not know why. Something congenital, not environmental.

Something which no amount of ageless wandering could take from him. The sky of Earth, the speckled velvet sky of Earth, unique like the tiny amorphous birthmark on his wife's arm must have been unique. Unique as his wife herself, the last woman in creation as he was the last man.

She must have intuited his thoughts. That was one of the powers which had risen in her, centuries ago, after ages of wandering. She said, "Are we really the last two? The last man and woman? Do you think—"

"Probably," he said. "If man still lived on earth we'd have seen traces of him from above, and we surely would have seen indications here on the ground."

"No. No, it's a big planet. You can't tell. Let's look—"

"Tomorrow," he said. "When the sun comes up. Or the day after that. Or a year from now, or ten, or a hundred. What's the difference?" He was being unkind, and he knew it. Whenever he spoke like that it frightened her. It made her whimper. In all the countless eons she never had accustomed herself to that. She always hurried, as if there were indeed reason to hurry.

This time she did not whimper. It was dark now and he could not see her face, but she said: "I don't like being immortal. Indestructible. Timeless. I hate it."

"Why? The dust at your feet is the dust of the races of man, pulverized a million years. Two million. Ten. You outlived them. You outlived them all. And if there's someplace else to go, you'll outlive their universe."

"I don't like being immortal."

"You've been to the ends of the expanding universe. You've been beyond them. You've been in the darkness which lies outside and you waited there with me while the universe expanded out to meet us like a bursting bubble. You've—"

"I'm tired, I'm glad we're back on Earth and I want to see Earth. I want to run in its fields and swim in its oceans and hear its life singing. But after that I don't want anything more. I think I want to . . . die."

The word had no meaning. He had seen creatures live and cease to live on worlds that could sire them, but it had no meaning apart from that. His wife could not die and he could not die. (It bothered him slightly at times to remember that he was eternal, and not to remember why or how. The memory cells in his brain were limited in number, and when they were used up older memories had been discarded to make room for newer ones.) The fear of death which was born at the moment of birth in all living creatures existed in himself only as a hazy half-remembrance, crowded into the farthest corner of his mind by a host of other data.

"You can't die," he said. "Nor can I. And if you knew what the word meant, really knew, you wouldn't even want to. It means you would sleep forever and ever, like you had never been born, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling nothing. Not even thinking."

The eager brook bubbled through her voice again. "I can die and so can you. There's a way."

"Right," he said. "There's a way." But it still had no meaning for him. She was merely tired.

"We could have a child. If we had a child then we no longer would be immortal. Remember?"

He did and he didn't. He knew it to be a fact without knowing how he knew. The whys and wherefores had been relegated into an unimportant classification, had been eliminated from his brain to make room for new sensory data. But the general conclusion remained. He knew that if they had a child they would age, gradually, and then finally one day they would die.

An ancestral fear stirred deep within him, sluggishly at first, so that he hardly felt it. But presently he was trembling all over, and he said, "We will not have a child."

Still holding her hand, not caring that he did not know why he should want to hold it now, he slept.

THEY FOLLOWED the gurgling stream to its source high up in the tumbling rocks, and listened to the gay, brightly-colored things chattering in the trees.

They journeyed down into the deep valleys where everything smelled of life and of life that ceased to live painlessly so that new life might be born.

They swam clumsily in the clear cool depths of a mountain lake, frightening the graceful horned things that flitted out from among the trees to watch them.

They found neither man nor the vestige of man.

"Man is dead," he said. "We have outlived those who sired us."

He could see that she did not want to believe this. "You can't be certain," she said. "If man found a better place to live and went there, we'd find no traces here on Earth."

He had not considered that possibility before, and having considered it now he rejected it almost at once. "No," he told her. "We've seen a thousand galaxies. Ten thousand. We've seen the few worlds that could support man. Is any better than this?"

She was laughing. The sound was musical (he knew that without quite remembering what music was), throaty and yet lilting, and he realized she had not laughed in a long long time. "Why do you laugh?" he asked.

"Because now you like Earth as much as I do. You love it. Oh, I want to stay here! Tell me we'll stay here."

"If you like. Ten of the planet's years, a hundred, a thousand—"

"No. I mean for the rest of our lives. Living on Earth the way everything else lives on Earth. If man is gone then we can be man again—and woman."

"Forever is a long time. We'd grow bored."

"I am bored with everything else. Not Earth. And anyway, I didn't mean forever. I don't want to live forever."

Because he did not want to admit to himself that he was getting frightened again he became cross with her. "You've been making a pretty good attempt at living forever for a long time. It's the right way for the last man and the last woman. All the others have perished, how many ages ago? We still live. We will live forever."

"Lords of creation," she said, pouting. "It's stupid, stupid! Any one of these scurrying Earth-things lives a happier life. It must hurry, it must fight adversity. But each time it sees the sun rise it knows somehow that it will not see the sun rise day in and day out until there is no more sun to rise, and the coming of daylight is more beautiful.

"When it eats it knows that food does not pop out of a synthesizer effortlessly, and the food tastes better. And when it sleeps, it sleeps with its mate, warmed not by an atomic heater but by the flesh and life of its mate, and it sleeps all the more soundly for that."

"I want to have a child. I want to have children, as all living things have, and then I want to see them grow big and strong and become the real lords of creation, and I want *their* children to take the job from them because they are younger and stronger. I want to sit back and watch them romp over the hills of Earth . . ."

He just listened, without saying anything. He did not find the desire within

himself to argue with anything she said. (Dimly he could remember what arguing was: that was when two people disagreed with one another and fought about it, but that was only when a decision had to be reached. When you had all time to determine any particular course of action, that precluded both decisions and arguments.)

But the deep-rooted rustlings of fear came again. It would be not unpleasant to sire a child, except for one thing. The act of conception would put an end to his immortality, and there was no recalling that. He would grow old, and when he awoke mornings his limbs would be tired. His skin would crease and fold with tiny wrinkles and his back would grow stooped. Then one night he would go to sleep and not wake up.

Ever.

He could remember dimly that that was the way. Sleep and more sleep and you wanted to wake up to do things, even something little like eating, only you never could. No, you didn't even *want* to wake up to do things. Even the wanting was gone. He felt sick to his stomach.

"We will not have a child," he said. "We won't stay on Earth. We will find our ship and leave this planet. Now."

She stood looking at him for a long time, and he was conscious of the little life sounds all around them, pleasant, beckoning, friendly. But Earth was dangerous. Too dangerous. He could feel the strange unfamiliar yearning within himself, even as she had felt it, and he did not want it to grow stronger. He might be sitting here among all these growing green things, bouncing a strong-thewed little man on his knee. (A child was like a man, only smaller, and not so smart.)

He could, but he wouldn't. For then he would grow old and then he would die and he didn't want that.

He saw the tears in her eyes, and as he had not heard her laughter, so he had not seen her tears, for ages. She said, "You can leave if you want to. Go ahead, leave."

"That's what I intend to do. Of course we'll leave."

She shook her head. "No. I'm not going with you. If I could not have a child, I'd still rather stay here on Earth. You go if you want. I'm staying here."

He looked at her for only a moment, and then he knew that she meant it. The concept at first had no more significance than the thought of death had the first day he thought of it. He was going. She was staying . . .

How could that be?

He knew. He would journey back to the ship and take off in it. That's how it would be. And then he'd never see her again because she was on Earth and he wasn't.

She turned her back and walked off into the forest, the line of her shoulders very stiff and straight, the gentle sway of her hips attractive, alluring, as every other movement of every other graceful living thing on Earth was. More so.

He called her name once and then again, but she did not turn around, and soon he could not see her through the trees. For a long time he stood watching the spot where the bronze of her back had vanished in the green, and if he were very quiet he thought he could hear the sound her naked feet made on the soft forest matting of things which had died so that other things might live.

His eyes smarted and then he looked across the clearing toward the low range of hills beyond which he knew lay the ship.

ON THE SIXTH day he found the ship, and one part of him knew secretly that he could take off at once, that in a moment Earth's sun would be a dim star behind him, and in another it would be lost in the faint light of a million other stars.

But the rest of him ignored this. He busied himself with checking every half-forgotten detail of the ship's mechanism, ignoring in his sudden enthusiasm the fact that the ship was thoroughly automatic and as eternal as he.

He also noticed the ugly black scar which the ship's landing had burned in the earth about him. Nothing grew there. Nothing. But that was as it should be. If something grew then the ship would no longer be eternal, just as if something grew out of the union of his wife with him, they would cease to be eternal.

What was she doing out there among the beautiful growing things of Earth? He doubted that she could be happy. He was not happy without her, it had been meant for him to be with her forever and ever, and she could not be happy either. Not this way.

But she liked Earth, and maybe all the sounds and smells and movement of the life of Earth could make her happy. Incomplete Earth . . .

Earth should have men roaming its surface, sailing its seas, working and playing in its valleys, laughing in the teeth of its storms (he had seen a storm in the far distance, where lightning bounced savagely from crag to crag in the higher mountains).

Earth didn't. Men had lived their allotted time and then they had passed away, utterly forgotten by the other growing things which continued to live and to die.

Not he. When you're eternal you live and you live and you live. You have your ship (which you made the same time you made yourself and your wife eternal, only you don't remember either very clearly now) and you travel from star to star, galaxy to galaxy, with no haste, no danger, no purpose—

He did not know where he could go now. He had been in that direction, and that, and that—as far as he could go. He remembered a concept, hazy: the universe was infinite, only it wasn't, because if you kept moving long enough in one direction you would come right back where you started from.

As they had done. At first they had not even known Earth was near. But something had told her, and later it had told him, and when they saw the galaxy, the size and the shape of it—a shining watch crystal hurtling toward them through space—they entered, and found the averaged-sized yellow sun and then the planet, and it *was* Earth.

Earth which needed men, as . . . as the ship needed his wife. How could the ship go without his wife, how could he go? Both were meant for her, always for her, and now she had come home to the incomplete Earth and she wanted to stay.

Futile gesture. It could not be complete unless he willed it so with her, and while that would be pleasant, that also would be death.

HE STOOD OUTSIDE on the seventh day since returning to the ship and he closed his eyes and tried to see what the planet would look like with men. A hundred, and then a thousand, a million, ten times ten times that. More. More than the stars he could see when night would come. As many as the stars in the shining arc of the Milky Way.

He wondered where he would go this time. It suddenly dawned on him (it had dawned on him before, but one part of his mind made him think that it was suddenly) that he had no place to go. The sky held no fascination for him, not any more, not ever again, not once he had seen Earth.

There were the stars with no planets, the double-stars, the novae, spewing radioactive dust into the timeless, void, the stars with dead planets, those with planets of life, except that they were too hot or too cold, too heavy or too light. No other Earths.

He could see the galaxies parading by in an endless procession of sameness, and suddenly he was very tired of it all.

Here on Earth, little Earth, little incomplete Earth which could be complete again if he so willed it as his wife willed it, was more variety than the expanding universe yet encompassed.

A wind was blowing, setting the leaves of the trees to whistling and a new chill was in the air. He knew that soon the wind would blow the leaves off the trees and it would be cold. But it would become warm again, and then new leaves would come to take the place of the old; fresher, younger leaves which would bask in the pleasant sunshine.

A new generation of leaves, even as he could sire a new generation of men, but at a price.

What price? A life of happiness, a short life like the leaves only longer, watching his sons grow, watching the little men who were not so smart as he but who one day might be both bigger and smarter. And then rest. Rest . . .

Now, what was unpleasant about rest, after a happy, exciting life among the growing things of Earth?

What on Earth was unpleasant about rest . . . ?

HE WENT AGAIN within the ship, and soon he came out. He had set the mechanism and he walked off into the forest.

He did not look back when he heard the roar, but he knew that if he did he

would see a streak of livid fire hurtling skyward, see it disappear in an instant, utterly and completely.

Intuition told him she was nearby. Then she had known he would change his mind, perhaps she had been nearby all these days.

He called her name, and she answered. All around him the forest was alive with little living things chirping and chattering and playing. He heard again the sound of naked feet on the soft carpet of Earth.

He walked to her and they didn't say anything for a long time. He was thinking of his sons who would one day inherit the Earth. Then he took her hand in his and he held it and she was trembling. He knew that he held her hand because he loved her (that was the reason!) and that love meant you wanted to have a baby, many babies, of your union.

"A great many," she said, laughing and crying. Now he knew what the word great meant. It was great to die so that you might people the Earth as the Earth had been peopled before.

To live a little, happily, and then to rest with the realization that you'd be more than immortal this way, with the fruit of your loins peopling the Earth. Thousands, millions . . .

Together with his wife he watched the sun go down and the stars come out, stars that would not assume their familiar patterns for another half a million years.

UNDER THE LENS (continued from page 120)

a good fantasy story just as much as a space opera. Let's see yarns about vampires, ghouls, werewolves, and other assorted spooks, as well as ray guns, six-headed Martians, galactic wars, and warp drives. They're all impossible, anyway! Who dares to disagree?

Second—In this day of shattering discoveries in all fields of science, let's not have stories taking place today or tomorrow. I insist—no sciencefiction story is worth reading unless it happens after the year 5,000 A.D. Otherwise, it's liable to be out of date by the time you read it!

Third—I'm getting sick and tired of all those people who complain about pretty girls on the covers of sciencefiction mags. Wassamadda they don't like girls? I like girls! Let's have more of them, and the sexier, the better!

There's a lot more I got to say, but I'll stop for now. I have to go beat up my grandmother. She's reading that stupid Dianausous book again! What does Hubbard know about the human mind? Does he have one?

MALCOLM GIBBS
Oswego, N.Y.

Now, now Malcolm—calm down. If enough of our readers felt the way you do about those things, of course we'd do them, but I'm afraid that there are conflicting points of view on many of these things. —ED.

Dear Ed:

A few words on your Feb. issue of MSS. First the story's Top three,

Forbidden Weapon—Alfred Coppel

The Man—Bryce Walton

Trans-Plutonian—Milton Lesser

I will add my voice to those others and say, keep the trimmed edges and go bi-monthly or even monthly. I wouldn't mind.

Also make the letter column larger and do away with those stuffy greetings that read—Dear Sir: Such formality I do not like.

There are a few things wrong with MARVEL as of course there are with all mags. But all in all you have a pretty good zine. Here's hoping you can continue to have a fine future.

GERALD HIBBS
Detroit Lakes,
Minnesota

Thanx Gerald, keep writing. Let us know what you think of the changes in MSS. —ED.

★ ★ ★

Space was limited here, but we will have a larger "UNDER THE LENS" column in the next issue.

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So here you are. It's your magazine. Let us know how you like it—everything about it—and if there's something you want in MARVEL (or out) let us know. As the reader commands, so shall we do!

—THE EDITORS

List the stories in order of preference—and there's room for any brief comment you might want to make (but of course we'd much rather see a letter from you, so send it along with the ballot).

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

COMMENT:

Mail the coupon (with your letter) to the Editor, MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES, STADIUM PUBLISHING CORPORATION, Rm. 1404, 350 Fifth Ave., New York 1, N.Y.

Star-Gazing Into the Future!

And maybe now man will actually be able to discover whether or not the universe is finite. That is the stunning news that comes to us from Palomar Mountain in California. Previously scientists had been able to penetrate "only" a half billion light years into space, using the 100-inch telescope on Mt. Wilson. Now with the 200-inch Hale 'scope on Palomar they'll be able to double this — and see out into space *a billion light years!*

The Hale telescope, according to the top scientist at Palomar, Edwin P. Hubble, might even, in time, allow mortal man to know the *actual dimensions* of the universe! And even you and I can begin to detect the staggering effect such knowledge would have on philosophy, on religion, on man's whole concept of his importance in the universe, of his meaning and destiny and chance of survival.

The Palomar scientists will probably go at this problem in one or both of two ways:

(1) They'll use their "Big Eye" to learn the proportion of matter to space. If the proportion exceeds a certain figure, Einstein has established that this will mean that the universe has a gravitational core that hugs everything to itself. Everything, that is, with mass, and since light has mass, it too would be drawn by the great magnetic field, and thus, theoretically, light from any star would return to its source instead of going off into infinity. Which, of course, would indicate that the universe was confined, was finite.

(2) The astronomers will count the number of galaxies in a selected section of space first with the 100-inch scope, then with the 200-inch one. They will keep in mind that the galaxies are distributed uniformly through space; and that the 200-incher will, having twice the reach of the 100-incher, touch 8 times the volume of space the 100-incher will touch. And they will then deduce that if the universe is infinite and so going off in straight lines in all directions, the 200-incher should count exactly 8 times the number of galaxies as the 100-incher. Whereas if the "Big Eye" can't find 8 times as many galaxies as the weaker scope, this will mean that light is travelling out into space in a curve — *that the universe is finite.*

Yes, we would say, with awe, with admiration, with boundless wonder, that the men of Palomar Mountain are engaging in the greatest experiment of all time. . . .

R. O. ERISMAN.

Starting with this issue, MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES presents:

MARVEL'S COVER-TITLE CONTEST

This is a contest for our SCIENCE-FICTION readers and fans. All you have to do is think up a title for the cover painting on this issue of MARVEL. Include this when you send in your letter — or if you hate to write letters — just send in the title. There will be ten winners, and — for the most interesting, clever and original titles — the following prizes will be awarded:

10 SCIENCE-FICTIONAL PRIZES

1st Prize — The original four-color oil painting (12x18 inches) which was used for this cover of MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES, painted by Norman Saunders, framed and dedicated specifically to the winner, by the artist.

2nd Prize — The original manuscripts, of the Dianetics Controversy, by L. Ron Hubbard, Theodore Sturgeon, and Lester del Rey, including the original portraits of these authors.

3rd Prize through 10th Prize — The original art-work for the illustrations in this issue of MARVEL, dedicated to you by the artist. All winners will be announced in the next issue of MSS.

CONTEST RULES

1. The entry must be postmarked no later than March 15th, 1951.
2. Entry should be sent to The Editor, Marvel Science Stories, Stadium Publishing Corporation, 350 Fifth Ave., New York 1, N. Y.
3. Anyone may enter this contest except members of MARVEL SCIENCE staff.
4. All titles become the property of Stadium Publishing Corporation and will not be returned. Decisions of our judges will be final.

There you are. It's easy, and you can win one of these fine scientificfictional prizes, so get that letter off today!